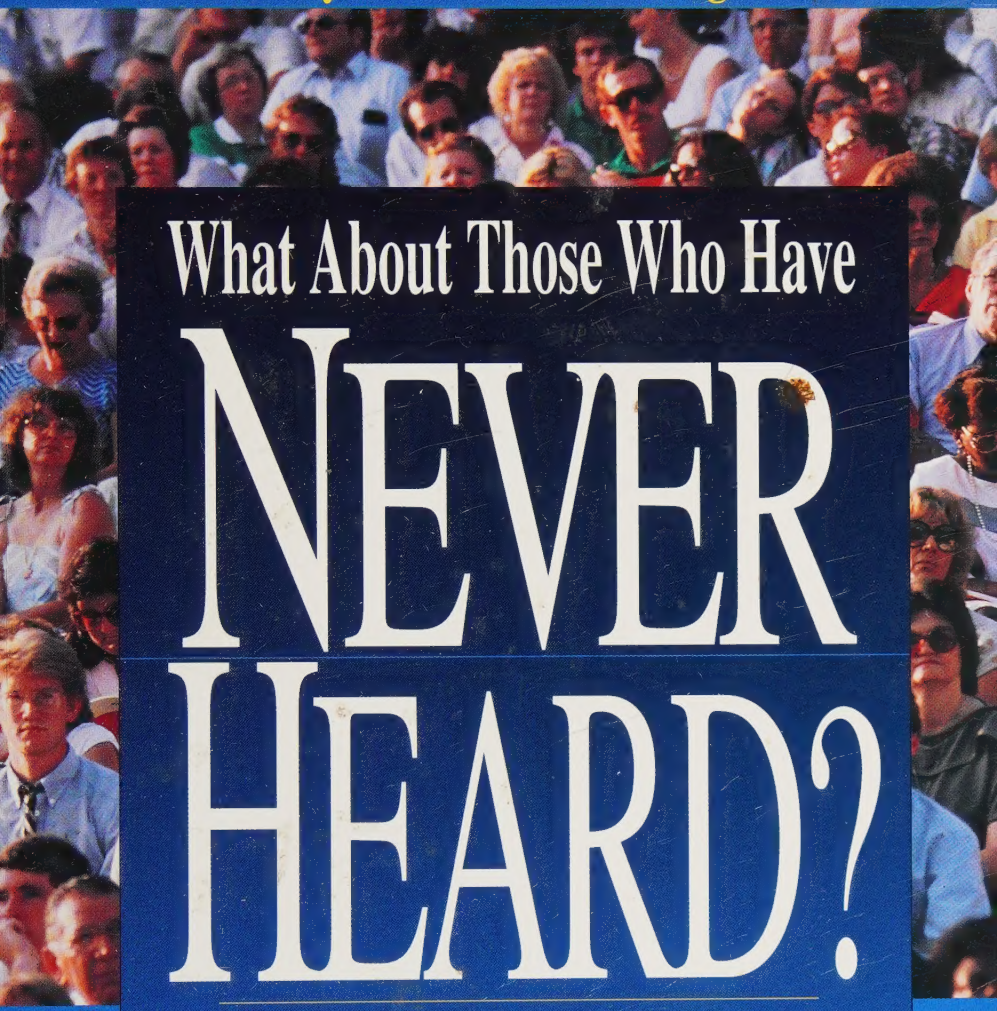
Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized



What About Those Who Have NEVER HEARD?

GABRIEL FACKRE,
RONALD H. NASH
& JOHN SANDERS

Edited by
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Introduction

JOHN SANDERS

WHAT IS THE FATE OF THOSE WHO DIE NEVER HEARING THE GOSPEL OF Christ? Are all the "heathen" lost? Is there an opportunity for those who have never heard of Jesus to be saved?

These questions raise one of the most perplexing, provocative and perennial issues facing Christians. It has been considered by philosophers and farmers, Christians and non-Christians. In societies where Christianity has had strong influence, just about everyone has either asked or been asked about the final destiny of those dying without knowledge of the only Savior, Jesus Christ. Far and away, this is the most-asked apologetic question on U.S. college campuses.

During my freshman year at a large state university, several of my friends and I regularly practiced evangelism. On one of those occasions a thoughtful unbeliever asked me, "If Jesus is the only way of salvation, then what about all those who have never heard about him?" At the time I had only been a Christian for a short while and consequently did not have an informed answer to give. Nevertheless, I acknowledged the importance of the question and later asked my pastor about it. He pointed me to some basic texts of Scripture but did

not, he said, have any firm opinion on the matter. In the years since that encounter, I have been asked the same question hundreds of times.

The Significance of the Issue

Why is this question so important that it is asked so often? At least three reasons may be given. Perhaps the most important explanation is that it relates to the problem of evil, which has occupied the minds of some of the greatest Christian thinkers. The problem of evil is usually stated something like this: If God is all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful, why is there any evil in the world? It would seem that if God is all-knowing, he knows how to rid the world of evil; if he is all-powerful, he has the ability to prevent evil; and if he is completely good, he *wants* to extinguish evil. So why is there evil?

A subset of the classical problem of evil involves the destiny of the unevangelized. This is called the "soteriological problem of evil" because it addresses an aspect of the doctrine of salvation, or soteriology. It asks: How can God be said to be all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful if Jesus is the only Savior and no one is saved except through him? If Jesus is God's only appointed means of salvation for the entire human race, does this not raise questions about God's goodness, power or knowledge?

The great fourth-century Christian theologian Augustine wrestled with this issue. He responded to Porphyry, a philosopher critical of Christianity, who asked,

> If Christ declares himself to be the way of salvation, the grace and the truth, and affirms that in him alone, and only to souls believing in him, is the way of return to God, what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came? . . . What, then, has become of such an innumerable multitude of souls, who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that he in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favored men with his advent?[1]

Porphyry's question is pertinent not only to those who lived and died before the time of Jesus but also to all those who have died since

Christ's advent yet who remained ignorant of his life, death and resurrection.

And this brings us to the second reason for the importance of the issue. A large proportion of the human race has died without ever hearing the good news of Jesus. It is estimated that in A.D. 100 there were 181 million people, of whom 1 million were Christians.[2] It is also believed there were 60,000 unreached people groups at that time. By the year 1000 there were 270 million people, 50 million of whom were Christians, with 50,000 unreached people groups. In 1989 there were 5.2 billion people, with 1.7 billion Christians and 12,000 unreached people groups. In addition we could think of all those who lived prior to the incarnation who never heard of the Israelites and God's covenant with them. Although there is no way of knowing exactly how many people died without ever hearing about Israel or the church, it seems safe to conclude that the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived fall into this category.

In terms of sheer numbers, then, an inquiry into the salvation of the unevangelized is of immense interest. What may be said about the destiny of countless billions who have lived and died apart from any understanding of the divine grace manifested in Jesus?

A third reason for the issue's importance is that many of us today have personal contacts with people from other cultures and religions. These acquaintances may well ask us about their ancestors who never heard of Jesus. This was brought home to me in a most poignant fashion when one of the three children my wife and I adopted from India asked me about the salvation of her birth parents. Was there any hope for their salvation? she wondered; she did not think they had ever heard about Jesus. Such discussions have become more common in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the peoples of the planet have increasing contact with each other.

Two Crucial Beliefs

With increased contact between people groups, we gain greater

knowledge of other religions, and certain stresses come along with that knowledge. New awareness of the multiplicity of religions has so shocked some people that they suffer from what Gabriel Fackre calls "christological heart failure." Some contemporary writers such as John Hick believe that in order to adjust to today's global sensitivities we must surrender any claims for the uniqueness of Jesus.[3] Jesus, it is claimed, is but one savior among many. Is it not the height of arrogance and intolerance, such people say, to believe that Jesus is the only Savior? Are not Christians incredibly narrow-minded?

The people who make such accusations consider the authors of this book narrow-minded and intolerant. For all three of us who have contributed to this volume refuse to sacrifice the ultimate importance of Jesus Christ on the altar of modern pluralism. Instead, we steadfastly affirm both the finality and the particularity of Christ. By *finality* we mean that Jesus is the full and authoritative revelation of who God is and what God desires. There is no revelation that will surpass him. The term *particularity* means that Jesus is the particular and unique individual whom God designates as our Savior. Salvation is not provided by anything other than the specific historical actions of God in Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Several biblical texts are commonly cited in support of this conclusion. The book of Hebrews, for instance, speaks of Jesus' being not an ordinary prophet but God's very Son who reveals precisely what it means to be God (Heb 1:1-3). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that whoever sees him sees the Father (Jn 14:9). Hence Jesus is viewed as the one who truly and fully reveals God. Moreover, Jesus is claimed to be the particular Savior of the world. It is not through the Buddha or Muhammad or other figures that God has worked decisively to save humanity, but through Jesus of Nazareth. The book of Acts proclaims that there is no other name than Jesus by which humans are saved (Acts 4:12), and Jesus said that no person comes to the Father except through him (Jn 14:6). In light of such verses, Christians affirm the uniqueness of the revelation and redemption found in Jesus.

The other important belief concerns the scope of salvation. The Bible clearly claims that God has both the knowledge and the power to provide salvation for sinners. Moreover, the Bible proclaims that God is good—good, in fact, beyond all we can imagine. And this good God wants to save sinners. Numerous texts speak of God's magnanimous desire to save.

Paul says, "He died for all" (2 Cor 5:15), and claims that Jesus' redemptive act has led to the acquittal for all (Rom 5:18). For Paul, Jesus is the focal point of God's grace, which makes him the "Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10; Tit 2:11). First John 2:2 declares that Jesus is the "atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

The New Testament often speaks of the divine will to share salvation with sinners. The second letter of Peter says that God does not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance (3:9). Paul says much the same when he writes of "God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Jesus himself expressed the same sentiment when he said that in his work of atonement he would draw all people to himself (Jn 12:32). John writes that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for our redemption (Jn 3:16).

The texts just cited refer to the divine motivation to save sinners. When these verses are placed alongside the verses supporting the affirmation that Jesus is the only Savior (particularity), some questions arise. Does God want absolutely everyone to be saved or only those who have faith in Christ? Is the atonement of Jesus only for Christians or also for those who never become Christians? This is an old debate, and readers will notice that the authors of this book interpret key passages of Scripture in different ways.

Nash affirms what is called definite (or limited) atonement, where Jesus died for a specific group of people, the elect. "All people" in the above-mentioned texts is taken to mean humanity as a group, without distinctions of race, gender, education and the like, rather than every

single individual. The passages that say that God desires everyone to come to repentance or that God loves the world are interpreted to mean the world of the elect, not all people generally. Fackre and Sanders, on the other hand, affirm what is known as unlimited (or indefinite) atonement, where Jesus died for every single individual, whether non-Christian or Christian. They interpret the passages speaking of "world" and "all" to mean that God wants every single individual to benefit from the work of Christ. Different interpretations of these important biblical texts lead to different views on the subject at hand.

The Views

These two central beliefs of the Christian faith, God's desire to save and Jesus as the only Savior (the universal and the particular), form the boundaries within which answers to the complex problem of the unevangelized are developed. Of course, major *themes* of Scripture as well as specific *texts* bear on the topic. Although the Bible does not address the issue systematically, it does provide the crucial information we need to arrive at a position. The three models discussed in this book present alternative understandings of Scripture on the issue.

Ronald Nash presents a view that he calls *restrictivism.* According to this view, God provides salvation only in Jesus Christ, and it is necessary to know about the work of Christ and exercise faith in Jesus before one dies if one is to be saved. God has divinely appointed the means of salvation, and that is exclusively through the preaching of the gospel—there is no other possibility.

It should be noted that Nash uses the term *exclusivism* as synonymous with *restrictivism.* This is legitimate for our purposes so long as readers keep in mind that not all people agree with equating the two terms. In the literature on religious pluralism, *exclusivism* designates the view that Christianity offers the only valid means of salvation; other religions are completely ineffectual for divine salvation, and God does not make use of them. Though exclusivism affirms the particularity and finality of Jesus, it does not necessarily entail restric-

tivism, since some exclusivists are universalists, while other exclusivists affirm an opportunity after death for salvation.[4] Both Karl Barth and Carl F. H. Henry are exclusivists regarding the relationship between Christianity and other religions, but they disagree strongly when it comes to the destiny of the unevangelized. Henry is a restrictivist, while Barth hoped for universal salvation.[5]

John Sanders advocates a position known as *inclusivism.* In this model God saves people only because of the work of Christ, but people may be saved even if they do not know about Christ. God grants them salvation if they exercise faith in God as revealed to them through creation and providence.

Gabriel Fackre propounds the view he calls *divine perseverance* (sometimes called postmortem evangelization). According to this view, those who die unevangelized receive an opportunity for salvation after death. God condemns no one without first seeing what his or her response to Christ is.

These three views have some interesting points of agreement and differences. As already noted, all three affirm the finality and particularity of salvation in Jesus. Restrictivism and inclusivism agree, against divine perseverance, that our destinies are sealed at death and no opportunity for salvation exists after that. Restrictivism and divine perseverance agree, against inclusivism, that knowledge of the gospel message is a necessary condition for salvation. But they disagree over whether that message must be presented by a human agent before death. Inclusivism diverges from the other two views by maintaining that God grants salvation even where the gospel is unknown. Inclusivism and divine perseverance both affirm that God makes salvation in Jesus Christ available to all people who have ever lived, whereas restrictivism denies this.

It should be noted that there are other views regarding the destiny of the unevangelized which are not discussed in this book. They may be summarized as follows.

☐ Some advocate a complete agnosticism, saying we do not have

enough biblical information to warrant a conclusion on the subject.

☐ Others, ranging from Thomas Aquinas to Norman Geisler, believe that God will send the gospel message to those who respond positively to general revelation. In other words, God sends more light to those who respond to the light they have.

☐ Some advocate a view known as middle knowledge, according to which God may save those he knows *would* have believed in Christ had they heard the gospel. Since God, it is claimed, knows how the unevangelized would have responded to the gospel had they been evangelized, God can save those who would have believed in Jesus had they heard.

☐ Some Roman Catholic theologians propose a version of postmortem evangelization called the final option theory. They believe that Christ encounters all people at the moment they are dying—not after death—giving them opportunity for conversion.

☐ Some, such as John R. W. Stott, are optimistic that God will save the vast majority of the human race, even though they do not know how God will accomplish this. That is, they refuse to take a stand concerning the *method* God uses to save the unevangelized, though they affirm that he does.

☐ Others, such as J. I. Packer, take a more pessimistic stance, asserting that though God may provide a way of salvation for some of the unevangelized, it is best to remain a negative agnostic on the matter. That is, God may do so, but we have no reason to think he will.

☐ Still others advocate a complete universalism, the idea that absolutely everyone will actually be saved through Jesus. Universalists, such as the early church father Origen, believe that Jesus will eventually bring all sinners into reconciliation with the Father.

☐ Finally, there are unitive pluralists, who go far beyond classical universalism by rejecting Jesus as the only Savior. Whereas traditional universalism says that all people will be saved by Jesus, unitive pluralists say even this is offensive because it implies that the major world religions cannot provide salvation for their own adherents apart

from Jesus. Unitive pluralists John Hick and Paul Knitter believe that the major world religions are all valid ways of relating to ultimate reality, so to uphold Jesus as the unique Savior is to be intolerant of other faiths.[6]

At the end of this introduction you will find a chart that may help you to sort out the differences among all these views. The diversity of opinions on the destiny of the unevangelized, ranging from restrictivism to universalism, shows that there is obvious disagreement among Christians regarding this issue.

Where Christians Agree

In acknowledging these differences, however, we should not lose sight of the fact that there is remarkable agreement on some major issues. All the above-mentioned positions, except for unitive pluralism, are marked by certain characteristics.

Affirmation of the finality and particularity of Jesus for revelation and salvation. Throughout the history of the church there has been consensus on this crucial point: Jesus is the unique Savior of the world and is the ultimate revelation of God.

The use of Scripture as a source of revelation. Each of the views (except unitive pluralism) seeks support from Scripture to maintain that it best encompasses the teachings of the biblical witness.

Historical precedent. None of the positions is new in terms of church history, for advocates of any of them can assemble an impressive list of adherents throughout the history of the church. This fact is important for two reasons. First, it corrects the historical amnesia whereby we often discredit one another's views as being either "new" or "old," depending on our biases. Some Christians have not heard about a particular position, so it may seem new to them, but it has actually already appeared on the historical scene. Second, it shows that Christians have never reached consensus on this important but difficult subject. From the early church fathers to the present day, Christians have not come to one mind on the fate of those who die

never hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.[7]

There is not unity of mind in the church regarding the destiny of infants and of mentally incompetent people who die. Much less is there unity on the fate of adult unevangelized who die.

Why the Lack of Agreement?

One may rightly ask, Why is there no consensus in the church on this topic? Isn't Scripture clear in its teaching? These are good questions, and several responses are in order.

First of all, we need to remember that there are a fair number of issues on which the church has failed to reach consensus. Baptism, the Lord's Supper and eschatology are but three examples. But despite our lack of consensus on such issues, we still agree on many significant points. The same is true in the debate over the unevangelized. All orthodox Christians agree that God desires to save sinners, that Jesus is God incarnate whose ministry made redemption possible, that human beings are sinful, that the gospel has power to save and that Scripture is authoritative for faith and practice. These are important agreements apart from which the discussion would be quite different.

A major reason we will not always agree is that we are finite creatures. We have limited knowledge and understanding. None of us know everything, and none of us know anything exhaustively. This means that our understanding of even the biblical texts will be partial. Though the Bible is authoritative for us, our interpretations of it will always fall short of the final word on the subject.

Another significant factor is that all of us are sinners, and sin affects even our reasoning processes. It is possible that our sinful desires get in the way of our properly interpreting the Scriptures. Pride, for instance, may keep us from admitting the validity of another person's argument. Nevertheless, despite our sin and creaturely limitations, the Holy Spirit continues to work with us in understanding the biblical message and applying it to the issues we face. We need one another—even our opponents—as we seek to arrive at God's truth.

Though each of the authors affirms the authority of Scripture, we each work from within a particular tradition of interpretation. Each of us approaches the test with our own background, interests and values in mind. This comes out even in the texts we cite and the way we state our case. All three of us develop distinctive models for the destiny of the unevangelized based on our interpretation of Scripture, which is shaped by our background position. There is nothing bad about this; it is simply admitting that we are creatures who are located in particular cultures and traditions that guide our thinking and valuing.

Each of the three of us, for example, belongs to a particular denomination. Interestingly, however, denominational affiliation is not determinative of what approach any of us takes respecting the unevangelized. Within the Baptist tradition, for example, one can find defenders for all three of our models. The same is true for Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and many other communions.

Furthermore, many theological categories that separate Christians on other issues are, for the most part, irrelevant here. Whether I am a Calvinist, Arminian, dispensationalist, covenant theologian, charismatic, high church or low church may give a particular coloring to the model I choose, but these factors do not determine which model I favor regarding the destiny of those who have never heard the gospel.[8] Some Calvinists, for example, affirm restrictivism while others defend inclusivism and still others postmortem evangelization.

What *is* significant for determining one's position on the unevangelized is one's particular view of the nature of God (especially the relationship between divine law and justice), the nature of the church, the significance of physical death, the value of God's revelation in creation, the nature of saving faith, the means of grace, and what method is best for doing theology. The stands we take on these issues decisively affect the answer we give to the question of the destiny of the unevangelized.

In other words, we cannot discuss this subject without raising questions concerning many other important doctrines. The subject of

this book inevitably impinges on other areas of theology, such as the nature of God, the role of the Spirit, the church, salvation, missions and eschatology.

Clearly there is a wide assortment of views on this topic within the church. The three authors of this book illustrate this diversity. We differ with one another on the fate of the unevangelized in part because we have different perspectives on various background issues. As a result, we develop different models for explaining the destiny of those who have never heard of Jesus. Readers who find a particular position in this book especially persuasive likely agree with the author on many of the background issues as well.

That we disagree with one another will be clear not only in the chapters but also in the responses at the end of each chapter. After one of us has defended his view, the other two are given space for a brief response, offering questions, criticisms or suggestions as well as clarifying points of agreement. Though none of us believes he can "prove" his model in a hard-and-fast sense, each does believe he can present a case that is more biblically based, theologically sound and practically relevant than the others. Here we leave our readers to judge.

A few words about the production and nature of this book are in order. Some readers may wonder whether I (Sanders), as the editor of the volume as well as a contributor to it, had an unfair advantage in producing my chapter. Care was taken to ensure that all the contributors were treated fairly. For instance, my chapter was completed before I had access to the ones by Nash and Fackre. Also, both Fackre and Nash were allowed to edit this introduction to ensure that no single position was given undue advantage or stated unfairly.

We hope our efforts enable our readers to become better informed on the basic questions, texts of Scripture and views on this topic. For those who would like more information, we have provided a list of suggested readings at the end. Although we have not produced the final word on the matter, we do trust that this book will serve God's people as they wrestle with this controversial question.

Finally, none of us believe we can know with absolute certainty who is saved or lost. But we can describe what we would say if we were asked by a person in a previously unevangelized society, "What about my ancestors? Is there any possibility of their salvation?"

Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized

Restrictivism	Universal Opportunity Before Death	Inclusivism	Divine Perseverance or Postmortem Evangelism	Universalism
Definition: God does not provide salvation to those who fail to hear of Jesus and come to faith in him before they die.	**Definition:** All people are given opportunity to be saved by God's sending the gospel (even by angels or dreams) or at the moment of death or by middle knowledge.	**Definition:** The unevangelized may be saved if they respond in faith to God based on the revelation they have.	**Definition:** The unevangelized receive an opportunity to believe in Jesus after death.	**Definition:** All people will in fact be saved by Jesus. No one is damned forever.
Key Texts: John 14:6 Acts 4:12 1 John 5:11-12	**Key Texts:** Daniel 2 Acts 8	**Key Texts:** John 12:32 Acts 10:43 1 Timothy 4:10	**Key Texts:** John 3:18 1 Peter 3:18–4:6	**Key Texts:** Romans 5:18 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 1 John 2:2
Adherents: Augustine John Calvin Jonathan Edwards Carl Henry R. C. Sproul Ronald Nash	**Adherents:** Thomas Aquinas James Arminius John Henry Newman J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Norman Geisler Robert Lightner	**Adherents:** Justin Martyr John Wesley C. S. Lewis Clark Pinnock Wolfhart Pannenberg John Sanders	**Adherents:** Clement of Alexandria George MacDonald Donald Bloesch George Lindbeck Stephen Davis Gabriel Fackre	**Adherents:** Origen F. E. Schleiermacher G. C. Berkouwer William Barclay Jacques Ellul

Note: The listed adherents of all these views agree that Jesus is the only Savior.

Inclusivism

JOHN SANDERS

THE PHILOSOPHY CLUB AT THE LOCAL STATE UNIVERSITY WAS SPONsoring a discussion on the nature of God. My interest was piqued, and I decided to attend. Several of the students present were Christians I knew, and some outspoken self-professed atheists attended as well. I listened attentively, but said nothing, as the conversation flowed back and forth between the Christians and the atheists. Finally Matt, one of the atheists, said, "I just can't see how anyone could believe in God."

Sensing an opportunity, I jumped into the fray, asking, "Which God don't you believe in, Matt? There are many different understandings of God on the market. Which one is it that you don't believe exists?"

Matt retorted, "The God who damns to hell all those who never hear about Jesus."

"Who says God does that?" I inquired.

"Christians do," he said. "A Christian on this campus told me that those who die never hearing about Jesus cannot possibly be saved. People claim that God is loving, but I don't see how God is loving when he does not provide the unevangelized with an opportunity to be saved. What kind of a God creates billions of people without any possibility of salvation and then damns them to hell? It is that God I don't believe in."

"It's true some Christians believe that," I replied, "but certainly not all. Some of the greatest Christians in history, such as Justin Martyr, John Wesley and C. S. Lewis, believed that God makes salvation universally accessible to all people who ever lived. Moreover, it has never been the official teaching of either Roman Catholicism or Protestantism that those dying unevangelized have no hope of eternal life. And to be honest, Matt, I don't believe in that God either."

Matt and I had more opportunity to chat later, and he was deeply impressed that thoughtful Christians had a response to what he considered a decisive objection to the Christian faith. In fact, he decided to reopen his interest in Christianity, saying, "Perhaps I've written God off a bit too soon."

What Matt was voicing objection to is part of what is called the problem of evil concerning the unevangelized (or the soteriological problem of evil). How can God be said to be all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful if those who die never hearing about Jesus have no opportunity to be saved? Doesn't God genuinely desire the salvation of all people? Some Christians had told Matt that there was no hope for people who had not heard of Jesus, and he mistakenly believed this was *the* Christian answer.

Fortunately, it is not the only Christian response to the problem. In this essay I will argue that God truly desires the salvation of all people and that he makes the redemption obtained by Jesus available to all.

The chapter is divided into two sections. First I will present the case for a scriptural view of God's mercy which allows hope for the salvation of the unevangelized. God loves all sinful people and desires their redemption. Then I will argue for one particular "wider hope" view known as *inclusivism,* which seeks to explain *how* the salvation found only in Jesus Christ is made universally available.

The Wider Hope

When discussing the destiny of the unevangelized, I begin with two

main teachings of Scripture. The first concerns Jesus' being the ultimate revelation of God and the particular person through whom God provides redemption for the human race. Jesus is the unique and unsurpassable revelation of God and is the only Savior (Jn 14:6-9; Acts 4:12; Heb 1:1-3). Moreover, Jesus is the goal or standard of what humanity is to be like. In him we find the fulfillment of our destiny, what it means to be a genuine human being. He is both the true image of God and the true image of humanness.

Furthermore, the atonement of Jesus is absolutely essential for the salvation of any human being who has ever lived—whether they were born two thousand years before Jesus or two thousand years after him. The New Testament writers present a variety of images concerning Christ's work which no single theory of atonement is able to capture. A number of points are worth mentioning on this score.

First, it was the Father's will—his goodwill toward sinners—that the Son should become human in order that he might bring us to glory (Heb 2:10). To redeem humankind God became human, for in the words of the church fathers, "what is not assumed is not redeemed." What they meant was if the Son was not truly human, then humans are not redeemed. In taking humanity upon himself the Son of God experienced our forsakenness, alienation and suffering. As a result, our very pain has entered into the heart of God, and thus one of the barriers between God and us is dissolved.

Second, even Old Testament leaders such as Moses and Elijah needed the atonement of Jesus for their eternal salvation. It is interesting that when Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus at the transfiguration, they spoke of the "exodus" he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). Jesus is the leader of the new exodus from sin. Without his redemption, the entire human race would still be under the bondage of sin.

The book of Hebrews adds to this point when it speaks of Jesus as the Son who once for all obtained our eternal redemption by entering into the heavenly tabernacle and making himself an unblemished

sacrifice for our sins (9:11-28). The author of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus has provided the full, complete and final atoning sacrifice—the sort of sacrifice to which no other offering is comparable. Jesus is the true human who vicariously repented and died for the entire race and who now intercedes for us (Heb 2:17-18).

Third, the Gospel of Mark declares that Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for our sin (10:45). Jesus has ransomed us from any claim the evil one may have on us.

Fourth, Jesus is victor over the forces of evil arrayed against God (Col 2:15). All the demonic forces were defeated through Christ's death and resurrection—a feat that only the unique God incarnate could accomplish.

Fifth, Paul says that Jesus delivers us from the divine wrath on sin (1 Thess 1:10) and from the penalty of death (Rom 6:23). In sin, human beings substitute themselves for God. In salvation, God substitutes himself for us. In Jesus, God absorbed our sin and bore the penalty of our unbelief. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor 5:19 NASB). The atonement could, I suppose, have been accomplished in a variety of ways had God so desired. But God decided to accomplish his purposes through the work of the Son in Jesus. Consequently, without the redeeming work of Jesus no human being could ever come to share in life eternal.

The other biblical teaching that is extremely important to the subject of the unevangelized concerns God's magnanimous desire to save every human being. Jesus died for the sins of all people (Rom 5:18; 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Jn 2:2). Moreover, God wants the salvation Jesus provides to be made available to all people. It is God's will for everyone to share in this great blessing (Jn 12:32; 1 Tim 2:4). God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

Sometimes people attempt to water down God's desire to save all people by bringing up texts dealing with the divine condemnation of the unrepentant. Another favorite move is to argue that whereas God

may *want* to save all people, the means he has provided for salvation is exceedingly difficult to find. Hence it is not surprising that some theologians simply deny that God wants all to come to repentance. But if God does not make salvation available to all people, then should these biblical texts be taken seriously? If God makes no genuine attempt to save the unevangelized, should it be said that God wants them to come to faith?

One day as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, a fellow asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" In response Jesus launched into a vigorous call for that person to enter through the "narrow door" and then told a parable about some people who thought they would get into the messianic banquet but did not (Lk 13:23-30). In Matthew, Jesus issues a similar warning: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (7:13-14). Jesus also said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:14).

It is not surprising that such texts have led some Christians to believe, with Augustine (a fourth-century bishop), that "many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it."[1] Other Christians who have studied the same texts, however, have come to a different conclusion. The nineteenth-century theologian William G. T. Shedd, for instance, says, "Two errors . . . are to be avoided: First, that all men are saved; secondly, that only a few men are saved."[2] Conservative theologians such as B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge went so far as to claim that "the number finally lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable."[3]

Restrictivists, who believe that all those who die unevangelized are damned to hell, cite the "narrow gate" texts and conclude that any talk of a "wider hope" is illegitimate. This "fewness doctrine" has, unfortunately, served to turn a fair number of people toward universalism (the belief that every single human being will actually be saved). Many

have been driven to universalism, or even away from the faith, due to the harshness of the restrictivist teaching that God justly damns all the unevangelized because they are sinners.

The remainder of this section will seek to show that the commonly cited "fewness" texts do not, in fact, teach restrictivism. Moreover, I will seek to explain how God's love in bringing people to salvation is not limited to the few, but extends to all people. First the radical nature of God's love will be examined. Then I will attempt to establish the principle that God includes in grace before he excludes in judgment. The section concludes with a look at the theme of "reversal" in Jesus' teaching, where some who thought they were sheep end up as goats and vice versa.

God's Radical Love

The prophet Isaiah provides the point of departure when he says of God, "His ways are not our ways." Though people often mention this idea, they do not usually have Isaiah's meaning in mind. When Isaiah writes that God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (55:8), he is not referring to some generic difference between God and humanity. Rather, the context clearly indicates that what distinguishes God from humanity is God's willingness to forgive those who have seriously wronged him. Isaiah says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found. . . . Let the wicked . . . return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD" (55:6-8). God's love is quite different from human love in that he shows love to sinners where we would not.

Some may seek to limit the divine affections to Israelite sinners alone, excluding Gentile sinners such as the pharaoh of the exodus. Yet an examination of the exodus narratives reveals that God's love and grace were shown even to the pharaoh who was brutally oppressing the people of Israel. In Exodus 5 Moses and Aaron go before

Pharaoh and inform him that Yahweh, the God of Israel, demands the release of the people. Pharaoh responds that he does not "know" this God named Yahweh of whom Moses speaks. The chapters that follow show how the God of Israel sought, through the plagues, to get Pharaoh to "know" him (Ex 7:5, 17; 8:10). The Hebrew word for "know" here carries with it the idea of relational and redemptive knowledge. Yahweh, the God of Israel, wanted Pharaoh and the Egyptian people to experience his truth and life-giving grace. The plagues were designed to show the uselessness of the Egyptian deities.[4] By demonstrating the impotence of the Egyptian gods, Yahweh sought to free Pharaoh and the Egyptians from this burden and grant them the opportunity to turn to him, the Creator and Redeemer. In other words, God was trying to evangelize Pharaoh and the Egyptians![5]

This is quite different from what I want God to do, since I do not desire the salvation of such a sinner. I think a better idea would be to send in the angel of death to assassinate him. But the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus is different: he patiently seeks Pharaoh's salvation.

Moreover, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart does not overturn this view of things, since the hardening does not automatically determine what will happen. The Hebrew word for "hardening" means to strengthen, so hardening does not render a person unable to repent. This is easily seen by the fact that God hardens the hearts of Pharaoh's servants (Ex 10:1), yet they understand what God is doing and implore their master to release the Israelites (10:7).

Furthermore, God several times uses conditional language regarding Pharaoh (8:2; 9:2; 10:4). Such "if" language makes no sense if only a negative decision by Pharaoh is possible. Evidently the divine strengthening of Pharaoh did not override Pharaoh's decision-making powers. The plagues were for redemptive and not merely retributive purposes. Truly God has never delighted in the death of the wicked. Punishment came to the Egyptians, but not before God did all he could to bring redemption into the situation.

This same point is brought out in the book of Jonah, where we read that God desired the redemption of the Assyrian people who had treated the Israelites with great cruelty. The prophet Jonah, however, did not share God's mercy. Rather, he wanted the Assyrians destroyed. Many of us are more like Jonah than like God. We want to see justice and judgment brought down on inhumane people; we do not want them evangelized.

Moving to the New Testament, we find the same teaching as in the Old Testament narratives. In Romans the apostle Paul declares that Christ died for those who are "ungodly," "sinners" and "enemies" of God (5:6-10). God loves and wishes to redeem helpless sinners—those who are not lovely and lovable. Paul and Peter agree that God does not want any to perish but for all to share in eternal life (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). The Father so loves the world that the Son became incarnate among us and did all that is necessary for the redemption of human beings who are unworthy and wicked. Jesus loved even those who loved him not: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Lk 13:34).[6]

Luke poignantly portrays this theme in chapter 15 of his Gospel, where Jesus has been eating with publicans and sinners. The term *sinner* in Judaism was a term of exclusion, referring to Jewish people who rejected the commandments of the God of Israel. These people had no place in God's grace and were not God's people. The Pharisees considered such people outside the acceptable boundary of God's kingdom. They took exception to Jesus' eating with them, since that action implied acceptance of the sinners. In response Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, which inform us that God is actively seeking his lost creatures.

But the parable of the prodigal son is one of the most powerful descriptions of the depths of God's love and grace.[7] In this parable the youngest son says to the father, in effect, "I wish you were dead so I

could get my inheritance now." If one of my children said such a thing to me, I would be horrified; a Middle Eastern parent addressed in this fashion would be even more outraged. The Middle Eastern listener expects the father to loudly denounce this son and expose him to public shame. Instead the father gives him what he desires.

After a time the son finds himself in destitution and decides to return to his father, not as a son but as a hired hand. Again, the Middle Eastern listener expects this son to be publicly shamed by the villagers and the father when he returns. Instead Jesus says that "while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). The father refuses to allow the son to experience any scorn from the villagers. In fact, the father humiliates *himself* by running to meet the son—an act that was undignified in that culture.

When the son begins to grovel in front of him, the father stops him and orders that the son be decked out in finery and that a party be thrown in his honor. These acts would confirm to the villagers that the father has completely accepted the young man as his son.

When the elder son returns from the fields and hears the party going on, he remains outside the house instead of going in and fulfilling his culturally defined responsibilities of helping his father entertain guests. Now the father again humiliates himself by going outside to meet this son. When the eldest son addresses his father, he insults him by failing to use a title of respect. And he does not even admit that the sinful younger son is his brother. Pharisees, remember, did not regard sinners as God's people. Nevertheless, the father ignores these insults and tenderly calls him "my child" (NASB), thereby showing his acceptance of this son also.

In this parable God is depicted as a father—but what an unusual father! Both sons publicly insult the father, and in both cases the father, in grace, humiliates himself and seeks reconciliation with his children. Though we are sinners, God, in gracious love, invites us to return to him. His ways are not our ways.

Inclusion Before Exclusion

This same accepting love is found even in such unlikely places as Jesus' teaching on judgment. It is worth observing that Jesus tells all the formal parables of judgment in the last few days before the crucifixion.[8] Consequently they must be interpreted in light of the ministry of grace he was on his way to perform. When this is done, it will be recognized that the judgment is precisely for forgiveness—not a settling of scores. In fact, these parables emphasize inclusion before exclusion, grace before wrath, acceptance before rejection. No one is excluded from God's grace who was not already included in it.

The parable of the king's son's wedding in Matthew 22 wonderfully illustrates this. The preceding context makes it clear that Jesus feels the religious authorities have rejected his messiahship, and in consequence he tells them that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them (Mt 21:31-46). The broader background for this parable is the messianic banquet spoken of in Isaiah 25:6-9, where it was said that Jews and Gentiles would eat together in God's presence.[9] By New Testament times Isaiah's encompassing vision had been curtailed, so that Gentiles were thought of as being largely excluded from the messianic banquet. Apparently the religious authorities thought it was to be an exclusive party, with the invitation list quite short.

In the parable Jesus says that a king sent out his servants to inform the invited guests that it was time to come to a party for his son's wedding. The initial invitations had been sent out long ago, and everyone had marked the event on their calendar. But for some reason those invited refused to come. Ignoring this insult, the king sent out other servants to urge those invited to come. Again they refuse. Some immerse themselves in business affairs, while others openly brutalize and even murder some of the servants.

Jesus is saying that just as the Old Testament prophets had been rejected, so the king's son is being rejected. The religious leaders refuse to come to the messianic banquet if Jesus is the Messiah. Their attitude is that if Jesus is the king's son who is getting married, they

do not wish to attend the wedding feast.

The king was rightfully enraged at this snub, so he ordered that those who spurned his invitation be destroyed. Jesus is telling us that there comes a time when the rejection of grace must be dealt with. When grace is refused—to the point of murdering the servants of the king—what else is left? Judgment comes upon those who despise the grace of God.

The king did not have to invite these people; he did so out of great generosity. So Jesus invites people to participate in the newness of life that he brings. If the life Jesus offers is refused, what can be left but death? The messianic banquet is only for the living.

The parable does not end here, though. This king was determined to have a party, so he sent out more servants to invite anyone and everyone to the feast. The invitations were indiscriminate, offered to "both good and bad" (v. 10). In the same way, God does not invite the good and snub the bad. He calls all, including sinners, to trust in his gracious love.

And the people did come to the king's banquet—so many, in fact, that the banquet hall was *"filled* with guests" (v. 10). Whereas the few nobility had refused to come, many ordinary citizens, peasants and even riffraff came and crowded the hall.

Here we see God depicted as an exceedingly unusual king! What human king would invite the common people, the lowlife of the community and even strangers to his son's wedding? What human king would so humiliate himself?

Unexpectedly, however, a problem arose at the banquet, as one individual thought he could come to the wedding on his own terms. When the king arrived, there was one guest not dressed in wedding clothes. The king requested an explanation, but the man remained silent, refusing to accept the king's grace by entering into dialogue. Clearly the king showed love and acceptance to this person, but he desired to come to the feast on his own terms. Consequently he is excluded from the party, for there is never a good reason for rejecting grace.

Then Jesus says, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14). This brings us up short, since it does not seem to fit with the parable—after all, the contrast was between the few who rejected the invitation to the banquet and the multitude who accepted it. Many commentators suggest that this was a proverbial saying in Jesus' day.[10] But what does it mean? I believe Jesus is turning this proverbial saying on its head and throwing it back at those who thought they would assuredly be at the messianic banquet. The religious authorities had long been invited to participate in the messiahship of Jesus, but they have refused. Thus Jesus takes a saying by which the religious authorities ruled themselves in and everyone else out, and applies it to them—saying, in effect, that the religious establishment is not among the elect but the sinners are! The Pharisees had been called but are not chosen because they refuse divine grace.

For our purposes it is important to note that in the parable the first invited guests, as well as the guests invited as replacements, are all recipients of the king's undeserved favor. Robert Farrar Capon explains:

> Nobody in the parable is outside the king's favor; everybody starts out by being, as far as the king himself is concerned, irrevocably *in. . . . Nobody is kicked out who wasn't already in.* Hell may be an option; but if it is, it is one that is given us only after we have already received the entirely non-optional gift of sitting together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.[11]

This does not sit well with us, because when it comes right down to it we are not all that sold on the idea of divine grace. Some of us would rather have our merits, poor though they be, rewarded, and we want everyone else's indisputably wicked behavior to be punished. On the other hand there are those of us who proclaim delight in God's grace to sinners while secretly desiring that God make this grace as difficult as possible to find. God certainly should not throw grace around indiscriminately, as in the parable of the sower. Rather, God should keep the grace where it will be protected and well appreciated—in the church.

But God will have none of this. The God of the Bible is utterly amazing: he includes all in his grace and excludes in judgment only those who spurn that grace. God has already accepted all people prior to any response on our part, but not all accept his acceptance. The saved respond in faith to the manifold graces of God, while the damned reject them. Because of the work of Christ, God accepts all. Only those who decline to accept God's grace are rejected.

The Great Reversal

Jesus did preach hellboundedness, but not for the groups that the religious authorities expected. Instead he gave hope for those considered outsiders while challenging the assurance of those who considered themselves insiders. Many Jews thought they would be at the messianic banquet simply because they were Jews. Some believed that precious few people would be saved and that God was quite pleased about that (see the apocryphal 4 Ezra 7:55-61). In light of this it is not surprising that someone would ask Jesus, "Will only a few be saved?" (Lk 13:23). Instead of answering the question, Jesus launches into a call for the questioner to make sure *he* is saved. Instead of telling him how many, Jesus talks about who will be saved (vv. 24-30). In doing so, Jesus again uses the imagery of a feast.

In ancient Near Eastern culture it was customary that once all the guests were inside the host's house, he would close the door. In this parable, when some people arrive after the door is shut, they knock on it and request admittance. The householder replies that he does not know them. They claim that he ought to know them, since "we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets" (v. 26). Again the householder protests that he does not know them and tells them to leave.

Robert Farrar Capon explains, "The dreadful sentence . . . 'I never knew you,' is simply the truth of their condition. He does not say, 'I never called you.' He does not say, 'I never loved you.' He does not say, 'I never drew you to myself.' He only says, 'I never knew

you—because you never bothered to know me.' "[12]

Jesus goes on to declare that some of his listeners will be distraught when they see the messianic banquet proceeding with the patriarchs and the prophets in attendance but themselves locked out. And if that were not bad enough, Jesus says that people will come from the four corners of the earth to join the feast while those who thought they had the right to enter are refused admittance. He concludes by saying the last will be first and the first will be last.

This parable would have been utterly shocking to Jesus' audience. It was unimaginable that they would be excluded from dining with the Messiah in the life to come. Much the same shock would have been experienced by onlookers in Matthew 8, where Jesus, impressed with the centurion's faith, says he has not found such great faith from any Israelite (v. 10). He then proceeds to say that *many* will come from all over the globe to the messianic banquet, while the Jewish authorities will be excluded. Even those who prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles may not be admitted (see Mt 7:21-23).

On the other hand are those who are unaware that God includes and accepts them. When the sheep are separated from the goats, it seems the sheep are a bit surprised that they had served the Lord (Mt 25:31-46). The sheep are accepted by the shepherd because they trust him and manifest that trust in action.

Yet there are those who believe they are without doubt members of the kingdom; after all, they say the right words and perform the correct actions. But Jesus reverses what they expected to hear. He brings their self-assurance up short while offering hope to those previously considered excluded. Conservative Christians especially need to hear this message—we usually fail to apply these texts to ourselves. Instead we use them to exclude others, especially the unevangelized, from God's grace.

Jesus' teaching about the "few" occurs in the context of the theme of reversal and should not be construed as teaching that the majority of the human race will end up in hell. In fact, when we consider that

elsewhere he says "many" people from "all nations" will be accepted into the kingdom (Mt 8:11; 22:10; 25:32; Lk 13:29; 14:23), that he compared the kingdom of heaven to a wheat field with some weeds (Mt 13:24-30)[13] and that Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 speak of a vast crowd of people, it sounds as though heaven will not lack for population.[14] The Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep as well as the goats, said, "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32). Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, but we must not turn the Good Shepherd into a wolf. Furthermore, the Father of the Shepherd is the God who "so loves the world," "desires all to be saved," shows compassion on sinful human beings and humiliates himself by inviting all indiscriminately to share in the eternal life he graciously bestows.

I have sought to show that the "fewness" texts harmonize with this and so do not rule out the wider hope for the unevangelized. In fact, the texts fit nicely as a call for those who ought to be in a closer relationship to God to commit themselves to that end. Moreover, the parables surrounding these texts depict God in familiar human roles. God is indeed a father, king, judge and shepherd; but he is a far cry from the typical human manifestations of these roles. His ways are not our ways because God loves his enemies, forgives sinners and humbles himself by inviting riffraff to divine parties. God includes all in grace before there is an exclusion in judgment. God accepts all sinners. Unfortunately, there are those who want acceptance on their own terms. There will be judgment and exclusion, but not because those excluded were never included. God grants inclusive grace to all the ungodly and asks only that they trust his acceptance of them.

The wideness of God's love and mercy toward sinners is utterly amazing—truly his ways are not our ways.[15]

Inclusivism

So God is generous in his mercy. But how exactly does God show redemptive grace to those who die never hearing the good news of

Jesus the Savior? If God loves the unevangelized and desires their salvation, is there a way for them to be saved?

According to the inclusivist view,[16] the Father reaches out to the unevangelized through both the Son and the Spirit via general revelation, conscience and human culture. God does not leave himself without witness to any people. Salvation for the unevangelized is made possible only by the redemptive work of Jesus, but God applies that work even to those who are ignorant of the atonement. God does this if people respond in trusting faith to the revelation they have. In other words, unevangelized persons may be saved on the basis of Christ's work if they respond in faith to the God who created them.

The Faith Principle

The book of Hebrews says that we cannot please God without faith and that faith involves believing that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him (11:6). If I were asked to summarize the overall teaching of the Bible on faith, I would say that faith involves three elements: truth, trust and effective action. Genuine faith in God contains some truth about God, whether that truth comes from the Bible or from God's work in creation. Faith means that a person responds in trust to the giver of the truth. If people genuinely trust God, they will seek to live it out in their lives. It is ridiculous to say, "I trust God but do not wish to put that trust into effective action in my life." Biblical faith means that we believe the truth God reveals, trust that God has our best interests in mind and act on the truth we have.

Most Christians have no problems with this understanding of faith. Differences do arise, however, over what one has to *know* in order to enter into a saving relationship with God. Some Christians maintain that only a full knowledge of the life and atoning work of Jesus can save. But is it really knowledge that saves us, or is it God? God is the one who saves, and he does this despite people's varying theological understandings. People are acceptable to God if they respond in faith, however limited their knowledge is. God judges people on the basis

of the light they have and how they respond to that light. The Presbyterian J. Gresham Machen said, "No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved."[17]

Once some friends and I were fishing on a large lake when a severe storm arose. We headed for shore, where we fortunately found an old cabin. Although it was locked up, we were able to wait out the storm in the shelter of its porch. The cabin's porch served us even though we did not know who built the cabin or who owned it. If the Holy Spirit guides the unevangelized to shelter, they may certainly benefit from it even if they have to remain on the porch.

There are, however, those who believe that "porches" are insufficient for salvation. In order to be saved, they claim, one must know such historical facts as Jesus' resurrection from the dead and understand doctrines such as the atonement. This sort of thinking displays an intellectualistic definition of faith. Faith is seen primarily as a matter of understanding certain doctrines rather than cultivating a trusting relationship with God. This misunderstanding of biblical faith has certain affinities to gnosticism, where salvation is brought about by special knowledge that an initiate receives. Such a view of faith implies that our predicament is ignorance and is solved when we learn certain truths—salvation by knowledge.

A major problem for this understanding of faith is the salvation of those who lived before and just after Jesus. Those who take a restrictive approach generally allow for the salvation of those who lived before Jesus but claim that since the time of Jesus one has to know about him in order to be saved. God-fearing Jews and Gentiles who died ten minutes after Jesus died but who had no knowledge of that fact or no understanding of its atoning value are thus left in a most pitiful position—damned to hell for not living long enough for Christian theology to be developed![18] But if we concede that such people are exceptions, then why aren't the rest of the unevangelized exceptions as well?

I am in no way against knowledge; in fact, my definition of faith

includes it. The issue is the *degree* of knowledge necessary for entering into a trusting (saving) relationship with the God of grace. The central problem of salvation is not knowledge of God but faith in God. Having a right attitude toward God is much more important than doctrinal information.

The unevangelized may be reconciled to God on the basis of the work of Christ even though they are ignorant of Jesus. I classify these people as "believers" in God, while those who know about Jesus and exercise faith in God through him are called "Christians." Despite this distinction, there is continuity between believers and Christians, and to this we now turn.

Premessianic Believers

Though increasing information about a coming Messiah is given over the course of the Old Testament, most Jewish believers did not understand that the coming Messiah would bring atonement, nor did they look to the Messiah as the focus of their faith. Rather, they "called on the Lord," who provided forgiveness for them. These believers did not know as much about God as Christians do, nor was their assurance of divine love as sure. Nevertheless, they could enter into a trusting relationship with God just as Christians do today, because it is the same God who is the focus of faith for believers and Christians.

Abraham, for instance, trusted in God to give him a son in his old age, and we are told that God proclaimed Abraham righteous because of that (Gen 15:6). Gideon trusted that God would be with him in battle, while Samson asked God to help him destroy a temple. These men of faith (Heb 11) had different information about God, so that what they believed varied. But even though the content of their faith varied, they all trusted in the same God. The apostle Paul makes this very point in Romans 4, where he claims that believers such as Abraham and David were justified by faith and so are saved, because it is the same God who provides salvation for all people no matter when or where they lived. Christians, of course, have the tremendous

blessing of knowing that God has raised Jesus from the dead for our justification—something neither Abraham nor David knew.

The story of the conversion of Cornelius from a believer to a Christian in Acts 10 illustrates these ideas. Cornelius was a Roman soldier described as one who feared God, gave alms and prayed to God continually (vv. 1-2). In fact, the angel sent to him informs him that God considers his prayers and alms as a memorial offering (v. 4)! God loves this believer and desires that he come to share in the blessings of knowing the risen Jesus, so he instructs Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter, who will bring him the good news of what God has done in Jesus.

Peter has a problem with this idea, as he does not believe Gentiles can become Christians without first becoming Jewish. But through this experience God enables him to say, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (vv. 34-35). Peter now sees that God opens his arms to embrace all those who trust God and seek to follow him as best they know. Bible expositor G. Campbell Morgan said in a comment on this passage, "No man is to be saved because he understands the doctrine of the Atonement. He is saved, not by understanding it, but because he fears God, and works righteousness."[19]

Some object to an appeal to believers such as Abraham and Cornelius because they are not examples of completely unevangelized people; they had some limited special revelation from God which most unevangelized people do not have. Acts 11:14 is usually cited in support of this claim: "[Peter] shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (NASB). But Scripture often speaks of salvation in terms of past, present and future. Paul can say to the Roman Christians, for instance, that they wait for their salvation even though they are already saved. In this light, Peter was sent to Cornelius to inform him how his future salvation has been accomplished, through Jesus, about whom the prophets spoke. More-

over, though Cornelius was a believer, it is possible that at least some in his household were not. Hence Peter was sent with the gospel message by which his entire household was converted. Cornelius was a saved believer before Peter arrived, and he received the blessings that come with a relationship with Jesus; some in his household were unbelievers before Peter came but received salvation through hearing the gospel.[20] Furthermore, the Bible does not contain any pure examples of believers without any contact with special revelation for the simple reason that the Bible tells only of those people who came into contact with God's special activity in human history.

What I am doing is drawing on the continuity of God's witness and human faith between premessianic believers and Christians and extending that continuity to the unevangelized. Baptist theologian A. H. Strong affirmed this continuity when he wrote, "The patriarchs, though they had not knowledge of a personal Christ, were saved by believing in God so far as God had revealed himself to them; and whoever among the heathen are saved, must in like manner be saved by casting themselves as helpless sinners upon God's plan of mercy, dimly shadowed forth in nature and providence."[21] Believers such as Abraham were "informationally B.C.," yet God accepted their faithful response. Today's unevangelized remain informationally B.C., and they may still come to faith in God through his witness in creation and his providential dealings with them.

Cornelius was not hell-bound before Peter arrived, and neither are unevangelized believers. But just as Cornelius and his entire household came to participate in the blessings of Christ after Peter, so we should seek to bring the Christian life to unevangelized believers.

Later in the book of Acts, Luke illustrates these very points in his account of Paul's preaching in Athens (chap. 17). Luke spends a great deal of time on this speech (though he most likely condensed it), for it models Paul's preaching to the Gentiles. Like Peter, Paul understands that God is at work among the unevangelized yet still wants them to come to faith in Christ. Paul acknowledges that the Athenian

philosophers are seeking God and that in several respects they are on the right track. He is able to find points of agreement with both Stoic and Epicurean philosophers.[22] God is known to them, he says, through creation and through providential activities among humanity. Because of this revelation, God expects humans to find God, for God is near to everyone (v. 27).

Interestingly, Paul does not refer to the Old Testament in his speech. He quotes only from pagan poets and uses the ideas and vocabulary of Greek philosophy in his attempt to reach these people. Yet all of Paul's points can be found in the Old Testament, because there are affinities between general and special revelation.

But the Athenians are not correct on everything, for Paul is critical of some aspects of popular worship. Actually the Epicurean and some of the Stoic philosophers agreed with Paul in their opposition to idols, while other Stoics disagreed. Earlier Paul had said that what the Athenians worshiped in ignorance he was going to explain more fully to them (v. 23). Contrary to what some of the philosophers thought, Paul does not see himself as introducing a new deity at all, for God has been at work among these people, and some of them have acknowledged God's involvement. Paul does not believe that all unevangelized people fail to worship God, though some do. Rather, his approach is to acknowledge that some are worshiping the true God, though without full knowledge, while others are not worshiping the true God at all. The gospel is important for both groups. Paul continues by saying that God has overlooked their ignorance and now calls on them to repent and embrace the gospel.

This, by the way, is exactly the same pattern of preaching Paul used when addressing Jews. Now that Jesus has come, old things have passed away, whether worship by general revelation or worship by levitical instruction. God now wants everyone to experience life in the Son. Now that the fuller revelation is here and atonement has been made for all, God desires both Jews and Gentiles to experience a more complete, satisfying and blessed relationship with him through the risen Jesus.

Paul is just as successful in his preaching at Athens as he was elsewhere, for some accept Christ (including a member of the governing council—v. 34), some reject the gospel, and others say they want to hear more. In Athens Paul finds believers who become Christians, unbelievers who become Christians and some who scoff. Nonetheless, the basic point holds that God desires believers, whether Jew or Gentile, to become Christians.

General Revelation and Providence

At this point we come to a dividing line between my view and that of the other two authors of this book. They do not agree that God would ever grant salvation to someone ignorant of Jesus.

It is common for people to say that there is enough information in the created order (general revelation) to condemn people but not enough to save them. This claim entails two serious errors. First, revelation, whether in the Bible or in the creation, neither condemns nor saves. It is God who condemns and saves. And *God* can work through any means *he* sees fit to use in order to reach those he loves. Second, saying that the God known through the creation condemns while the God known through the Bible saves sounds as though there are two Gods—one damning and one saving. But there is only one God, whose Holy Spirit is actively seeking the lost wherever they be.

God has given all people a witness to himself as creator (Ps 19; Rom 1:20). He has placed signs in the heavens (Deut 4:19) and given seasons to humanity that we might seek and find him, though he is not far from any one of us (Acts 14:17; 17:26-27). God has acted not only as creator but also as providential provider in history. The prophets of the Old Testament declared that the Israelites, who received special revelation, were not the only ones for whom God worked an exodus (Amos 9:7) or provided land (Deut 2:5, 9, 19, 21-22). God was at work outside the boundaries of national Israel, for God cared about the other peoples also. True, God was working through Israel to bring about *the* act of redemption (Jesus) that would provide the basis for the salvation

of the entire world. But that does not nullify God's redemptive actions elsewhere.

There are people who are unevangelized, but that does not mean they are unreached by God. God does not limit his goodness to us by our knowledge of him.

Some will misunderstand this to mean that people can save themselves by their own willpower or actions, so let me make some clarifications. First, nobody comes to God without the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the world convicting people of sin and seeking to turn their sinful hearts toward God. Whether people have creational or biblical revelation, it is the same Spirit who guides them to God, either through knowledge of the historical Jesus or through creation and providence.

Second, it is not our own righteousness that counts but that of Christ. But the righteousness of Christ is not credited to us because we assent to some piece of knowledge. Rather, it is accounted to us on the basis of faith in God, whether that God be known as Creator or as the Incarnate One. The Holy Spirit seeks to develop faith in us regardless of the sort of revelation we have.

Third, I am not ignoring the fact that the unevangelized are sinners who have turned away from God. It is sinners that the Holy Spirit desires to turn around—beginning with repentance. It is not beyond the Spirit's wisdom or power to reach sinners.

Peter and Paul came to the realization that there were Gentiles who worshiped the true God despite the fact that some of them had limited knowledge of the Old Testament while others remained completely without special revelation. In his book *Eternity in Their Hearts,* missionary anthropologist Don Richardson has documented numerous cases where God was at work redemptively with people groups prior to Christian missionaries.[23] He calls his basic insight "the Melchizedek factor." Melchizedek was a pagan priest-king to whom Abraham paid tithes and who pronounced a blessing on Abraham. It is fascinating that the Genesis narrative describes Melchizedek as a

priest of "God Most High" (14:18)—he worships the same God as Abraham (14:19)—and this evidently without any special revelation from God. The Bible apparently is not as protective of God's worship as some Christians are.

Though Richardson details many accounts of God's work among pre-Christian peoples, I will mention only one. Two Christian missionaries came to the Santal people in India. One day they heard an elder speak of the "genuine God," Thakur Jiu. When they inquired who this God was, they heard a fascinating story of how the Santal had worshiped Thakur Jiu before they came from the Middle East to India. As they migrated toward India, they could not find a pass through the mountains, so they propitiated the evil spirits of the mountains to let them through. Once through, the people had felt obligated to continue to appease the evil spirits. Over time they lost much of their knowledge of the Creator God, but they longed for reconciliation. The two missionaries concluded that Thakur Jiu and the God of the Bible were the same, and they proceeded to inform the people of what this God had done through his Son to reconcile them. The people were overjoyed to hear that their God had not forgotten them, and a remarkable number of baptisms followed in the years ahead. Many believers longing for God became Christians.

Richardson shows that there have been numerous people groups and individuals who have sought the Creator—or Most High—God. Sometimes these people tell stories bearing remarkable parallels to biblical accounts such as those of the creation and flood. Others claim to have lost an important "book" about the Creator God and wait to hear again from God.

Truly God has not left himself without witness. Nor has his compassion for sinners been put on hold until human missionaries can bring the gospel to those he loves. God certainly wants all people to hear about the wondrous things his Son has accomplished. But the Spirit is active when, where and how he pleases, bringing people into a relationship with God even before the gospel reaches them.

The great Christian writer C. S. Lewis agreed with these sentiments. He thought that those who commit themselves in trust to that which lies behind all truth and goodness will be saved even if they are ignorant of Jesus. "There are," he said, "people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it."[24] Elsewhere he wrote: "I think that every prayer which is sincerely made even to a false god . . . is accepted by the true God and that Christ saves many who do not think they know him."[25]

In his well-known Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis tells of a man named Emeth (truth) who had been raised in a country where the chief god was named Tash. Emeth fought against the country of Narnia with its God Aslan (the Christ-figure), whom Emeth thought evil. Through a series of circumstances Emeth has a vision of the god Tash and realizes that Tash is the evil one. Repulsed by the vision, he wanders into the woods. There Aslan meets him, and the following dialogue ensues:

"Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash."

He answered, "Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. . . . I take to me the services which thou hast done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted." . . .

But I said also (for the truth constrained me), "Yes, I have been seeking Tash all my days."

"Beloved," said the Glorious One, "unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."[26]

For Lewis, God saves the unevangelized according to the faith principle. To those who seek glory and honor and immortality, God will grant eternal life (Rom 2:7).

Paul's Teaching in Romans

Some believe this notion that God can reach the unevangelized without human missionaries is overly optimistic, given Paul's teaching in Romans 1—3. These detractors claim that the unevangelized could be saved if they never sinned against God and if they lived morally perfect lives. But no one does this—so, it is claimed, the unevangelized cannot be saved. This is a distortion, however, of Paul's teaching in Romans.

To properly grasp what Paul is saying in this letter, we need to understand the issue Paul was addressing.[27] Paul was not, as is commonly assumed, arguing against people who thought they could earn their way to heaven by performing good deeds. Jewish theology never demanded moral perfection as a prerequisite for salvation. Instead Paul was rejecting the traditional Jewish thinking of the day that set Jews apart from Gentiles.

Religious Jews thought themselves included in divine grace while Gentiles were excluded. The reason they considered themselves "in" was not their own goodness but simply the fact that God had chosen them by grace from among the nations. As a faithful response to God's grace, they were to practice what God said to do. Doing what God said did not earn favor with God, but it did demonstrate that one was included in the realm of grace or the covenant. In other words, there were certain "boundary markers" or "badges" that distinguished those who had received divine grace from those who had not.

All social groups have boundary markers that distinguish them. The Boy Scouts, for example, have certain characteristics that differentiate them from the Shriners clubs. At the time of Paul three specific badges were singled out to mark covenant membership: sabbath observance, food regulations and circumcision. Living within these boundaries did

not earn salvation. Rather, they were the signs that one had already received salvation. The Gentiles, living outside these boundaries, were obviously excluded from divine salvation, for they did not display the badges of covenant membership.

Most of Paul's Jewish readers would have enthusiastically agreed with what he wrote in Romans 1: all Gentiles are sinners before God, even though God has revealed himself to them through the creation. That all Gentiles were sinners was a truism within Judaism. Gentiles remained outside the covenant and thus were excluded from divine grace. According to the Jewish thought of Paul's day, if one was *ignorant* of the proper badges, one could not be saved. The only possibility for Gentiles to find salvation was to gain *knowledge* of the covenant (the Old Testament) and come under its control. That was why many Jewish Christians argued that the Gentiles first had to become Jewish before they could be Christians.

Paul, however, thinks this a gross misunderstanding of the gospel. For him, God's grace extends to those beyond the boundary markers of national Israel. Moreover, Paul claims that the fact that someone has the proper badges of keeping the sabbath and food laws does not guarantee justification before God. For he argues in Romans 2 that Jews too are sinners before God, covenant or no covenant. Jewish people felt secure that they were saved simply because they were members of the covenant community. Paul brings them up short when he says that even though they have special revelation, they are sinful and in need of a Savior.[28] Simply possessing the public badges of national identity does not guarantee salvation.

Paul concludes in chapter 3 that all Jews and Gentiles have sinned and stand in need of a Savior. God has provided this Savior in the person of Jesus, and it is faith that appropriates salvation to us. Faith in God is the only badge that Paul will allow.

What Paul writes against Jewish exclusivism is relevant for the question of the unevangelized, since some Christians maintain that only those who gain *knowledge* of God's activity in Jesus, and hence

become members of the visible church, can be saved. If one does not possess the badges of church membership, whether baptism or a profession of faith, one cannot be saved. But just as God's grace cannot be restricted to ethnic Israel, so it cannot be restricted to those who hear about Christ before they die. Just as salvation extends beyond the boundaries of those with the badges of Jewish identity, so it extends beyond the boundaries of the public church. If people, moved by the Spirit of God, exercise faith in God, no matter what revelation of God they have, they are saved by the merits of Christ.

For Paul there is no other Savior than Jesus. Even Abraham, Moses and David are granted eternal life only on the basis of Jesus' atonement. They experienced divine grace in their day because God knew how he was going to handle their sin. We human beings, including Abraham and Moses, cannot save ourselves, for we have all sinned and fallen short of honoring God, and God is pouring out his wrath on human sinfulness (Rom 1:18). But Jesus dies for us, the ungodly (5:6), and "through [his] one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all" (5:18 NASB). Jesus becomes the representative of the entire race to provide what none of us could: peace and reconciliation with God. By taking our sin on himself, Jesus becomes the one great sinner. He is the judge judged in our place.

The justification of all ungodly people by the work of Christ leads Paul to see humanity in a radically new light. Paul now understands that God loves all sinners, that God has taken care of human sin with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that anyone can benefit from that work through faith in God (Rom 4:24—5:18). God is looking for those who will trust him, and Gentiles can trust God even if they remain ignorant of special revelation. Because of Christ, God will grant eternal life to all who enter into a trusting relationship with God, regardless of whether they know about the covenant (2:6-7).

For Paul, all who love their neighbors demonstrate that they have the law written on their hearts (2:14-15) and so fulfill what God wanted (13:8). A genuine faith in God manifests itself in love of both

God and neighbor. Such faith and love is not limited to those within the visible boundaries of synagogue or church. Again, it must be stressed that such people are not saved by works but by the merciful God who saves all who trust in him. Paul would never allow that faith and love come about in the human heart except by the grace of the Holy Spirit. When Paul speaks of "the obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26) it is always as a response to divine grace.

There is only one God for Paul (Rom 3:30), and that God is related to all people as Creator. He seeks the response of creaturely dependence from humanity, and such faith is possible, under the leading of the Spirit, for Jew or Gentile, evangelized or unevangelized.

Why then does Paul proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles? Because Christ is the clearest and ultimate expression of God. The revelation of God in Christ is greater than, but on the same trajectory as, the revelation of God in creation. In the gospel we experience the goal of creation, what God intended from the beginning.

Some ask, "If general revelation can save, why did God bother to provide special revelation?" Again, revelation does not save—God does. Furthermore, as was said above, the Christian enjoys many blessings that the believer does not experience. Though walking will get you from Chicago to Seattle, there are many blessings to going by plane.

Others object that Paul says in Romans 3 that all are sinners and so any hope for the unevangelized is ruled out. But if Paul means to say there that all those mentioned in the first two chapters are outside the boundaries of salvation, then a serious problem arises. If Paul means that no Jews and no Gentiles were saved before Christ, then obviously not even people such as David and Abraham were saved. Of course no one accepts this conclusion.

I find it interesting that people are so willing to use Romans 1—3 to rule out hope for the unevangelized (since they are all sinners) but unwilling to accept the conclusion that since Paul has included the entire human race in his argument, any hope for premessianic Jews

has also been eliminated. The question is not whether people can be saved by obtaining moral perfection. The issue, rather, is whether God grants sinners—as sinners—an opportunity for salvation.

It is best to understand Paul as arguing against Jewish exclusivism, saying both Jews and Gentiles are in the same boat of sin. Consequently, God can save those on the sinking ship in the same way—through faith. We have already discussed the faith principle that Paul uses to claim that premessianic Jews were saved by faith irrespective of social badges. The faith principle allows Paul to say that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by faith regardless of the revelation they have. There were obviously premessianic Jews who had faith in God (Rom 4), and Paul suggests that there are unevangelized Gentiles who also have faith in God, though what they know about God is limited to God's work in creation and providence (2:6-16). So we arrive at two groups of people: (1) those who know God by either general or special revelation yet who refuse to trust God and (2) those who know God by either general or special revelation and who do trust God. Because of the cross of Christ, all who have faith in God are saved whether they be premessianic Jews, unevangelized Gentiles or Christians. In Romans Paul says that God shows mercy on whom he desires (9:18), and fortunately for us, he declares that God is "merciful to all" (11:32).

Some Christians have a difficult time accepting this because it implies that people can be saved who do not exhibit the necessary badges. How can people be saved, they ask, if they do not speak of being "born again," do not go to church or are not baptized? Many consider these the proper badges that demonstrate that one is saved. Evangelicals emphasize the importance of a verbal profession of faith. In fact, saying the right words—"Jesus, I accept you as my Savior"—functions as a liturgy or religious ceremony that allows us to publicly distinguish who is included and who is excluded from divine grace. By use of such badges some are sure they are sheep, not goats, and have made it through the narrow door.

Such thinking reflects the exact viewpoint that Paul argued against

so vehemently. For Paul, no public badge guarantees that one is in a right relationship with God. Faith is the only badge that Paul allows. And faith may be exercised by both Jew and Gentile, evangelized and unevangelized.

What About Infants?

It may seem strange to think of God saving people on the basis of Christ's work when those people are unaware of that work. But a moment's reflection will reveal that most Christians readily allow for people to be saved apart from knowing about Jesus. Virtually all Christians today affirm that babies and mentally incompetent people who die are saved by Christ even though they know nothing about Jesus and do not exercise faith in him.

Remember, throughout history death rates for children have been extremely high. The majority of persons born have died very young, most because of disease but many also by infanticide and abortion. Most Christians believe all these are saved though they are ignorant of Christ. Hence the majority of the human race is saved apart from knowledge of or faith in Christ.

I am suggesting that we extend this same sort of reasoning to include the adult unevangelized who respond to God in faith. We already have a precedent in the salvation of those dying in infancy. Does God love adult unevangelized persons less than he loves infants?

Two objections are raised against this inclusivist argument. The first one draws a distinction between the "abilities" of infants and those of adult unevangelized. Adult unevangelized have the ability to respond to the gospel, if they hear it, while infants do not have such an ability. Ramesh Richard says that God saves babies, but not adult unevangelized, because infants are "unable to accept salvation, at any point in their lives."[29] Infants are physically as well as mentally unable to respond to the gospel. However, I affirm that adult unevangelized are just as physically and mentally "unable" to respond to the gospel, for they die before missionaries ever reach them physically; they are

mentally unable to exercise faith in Jesus, because they never hear of him. After all, even on the restrictivist view those who are "unable to accept salvation" certainly include adult unevangelized, since it is claimed that God cannot use general revelation to save them. They are totally outside the sphere of salvation. If, as restrictivists profess, there are two categories of people who are saved—(1) those who place their faith in Jesus and (2) those who are incapable of responding to Jesus—then why not include at least some adult unevangelized in the second group?

This brings us to the second objection, the claim that adults are guilty of "actual sin" while infants are guilty only of "original sin," which God overlooks because of Christ. But if God overlooks original sin due to the atonement of Jesus, then why can't God apply the atonement to those adult unevangelized who exercise faith in God? Though both groups remain ignorant of the atonement, the God who desires all to be saved can redeem sinners on the basis of the righteousness of Christ.

We dig deeper into this question when we recognize that all Christians have not always been willing to concede the salvation of infants who die. Thinkers such as Augustine held that only baptized babies could be saved.[30] What changed the theological landscape in favor of admitting all those dying in infancy to eternal life? A change in the theology of the character of God. God had been understood as an angry God who hated sinners but decided to save a few of them to demonstrate his graciousness. Fortunately, theology finally got back to its biblical moorings, where God is truly just and condemns sin but loves all sinners and sends the Son who atones for them. The theology of God's radical love for sinners—including infant sinners—overturned the theology of a parsimonious God, allowing us to understand that God desires the salvation of the least of these.

This is the theology I am tapping into—a theology that affirms the dreadful realities of sin but also maintains God's ability to triumph over sin in providing redemption for sinners. God hates the sin that

destroys the beings he created, for love cannot stand by and watch the beloved ruin herself. Divine love detests the corruption of sin, but it also motivates God to redeem the situation. It is this God who makes salvation universally available to Abraham, to Job, to babies dying in infancy and to the rest of the unevangelized.

Missions

But if the unevangelized can be saved apart from missionaries, why should we support missions? Is not the only reason for missions that people cannot be saved unless they hear the gospel from another human being? Doesn't any other view sever the nerve cord of missionary motivation?

No, it does not. John R. W. Stott, a great contemporary spokesman for missions, writes,

> I have never been able to conjure up (as some great Evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but will inevitably perish. On the other hand . . . I am not and cannot be a universalist. Between these extremes I cherish the hope that the majority of the human race will be saved. And I have a solid biblical basis for this belief.[31]

Though Stott affirms the wider hope, he has consistently maintained high activity in missions. This was also true for early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen as well as for John Wesley. They held to the wider hope and yet were three of the most fervent and thoughtful Christians when it came to pleading with non-Christians to come to faith in Christ.

The restrictivist viewpoint (that all the unevangelized are damned) has for so long been trumpeted as the only motivation for missions that many Christians are unaware that this was *not* the motivation of many of the great missionaries in history. I am not suggesting that the danger of damnation be dismissed as a reason for evangelism, but the missionary table needs more than one leg to stand on. When missions is supported with only the restrictivist leg, the table collapses under

the weight of the problem of evil. If God wants all to be saved but none can be saved except those who hear about Christ, then God cannot save those he desires. Moreover, if salvation is entirely dependent on human preaching, then some people will suffer eternal damnation due to the failure and disobedience of Christians. In other words, their damnation is the result of the sin of Christians. Is this divine justice? Does this disclose to us the God who seeks the lone lost sheep? In view of such problems, the missionary table is in need of new supports.

Fortunately, there are several other, very strong legs for supporting missionary motivation. First and foremost, Jesus commands us to go (Mt 28:18-20). Second, we who have experienced the love of God in the Son through the Spirit should desire to share the blessings of the Christian life with those ignorant of it. Third, there are, of course, people who are not believers in God, and they need to hear of Christ so that they may come to know the love of God. Finally, even though unevangelized believers will be given eternal life on the basis of Christ's work, God wants them to experience the fullness of life that came at Pentecost. A relationship with the risen Lord affords a much richer spiritual life than can be had through only a knowledge of the Creator. Christians possess the messianic blessings of an assurance of salvation as well as the ultimate revelation of who God is and what God desires. Moreover, Christians have the benefit of fellowship in the Christian community. These are more than sufficient reasons for wanting unevangelized believers to become Christians. The salvation Jesus provides is, after all, not simply for eternal bliss but also for the abundant life now.

Perhaps an analogy will help. What if we knew of a group of people who lacked pure drinking water and were suffering from diarrhea and dehydration? What if we also knew that they would survive despite these problems? Would we then be exempt from helping them now? Would we be justified in sitting by idly while they suffered? I think not. We have ample reasons for taking the needed technology to them

now even if they will survive without it.

Conclusion

I have now surveyed the basis for the wider hope and one particular way in which God's universal desire to save may be accomplished. It has been argued that God loves all sinners and wants them to be saved. All who are saved are redeemed only because of the work of Christ. On the basis of the atonement of Jesus, God accepts all who exercise faith in him regardless of the extent of their knowledge. Both biblical and theological arguments have been surveyed, though no claim to any sort of hard "proof" has been advanced. All that is claimed is that inclusivism provides a solid framework for handling the soteriological problem of evil (the destiny of the unevangelized).

The inclusivist solution to the problem is not at all new; it has been defended throughout history by some of the greatest Christian thinkers—people as diverse as Justin Martyr, Abelard, Erasmus, Zwingli, John Wesley, William Shedd, A. H. Strong, Karl Rahner, C. S. Lewis and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Inclusivism has supporters from within a wide range of traditions: Baptists, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Presbyterians, Quakers and Roman Catholics. Moreover, inclusivism has representatives from an assortment of different theological categories (such as Calvinists and Arminians). In fact, inclusivism "probably represents the nearest approach to a consensus among Christian thinkers today."[32] Many devout Christians throughout history and from a wide array of traditions and theologies have found inclusivism the best solution to this aspect of the problem of evil.

God is inviting a great multitude to the wedding feast of the Lamb. It is the King who draws up the guest list, and if the parable of the wedding of the king's son is any indication, God invites all indiscriminately. Even though not all accept the invitation, we look forward to the wedding hall's being filled with guests from every tribe and nation.

Response to Sanders

GABRIEL FACKRE

JOHN SANDERS STRIVES MIGHTILY TO MAKE A CONVINCING CASE FOR inclusivism. We are in his debt for advancing the argument, as well as for the fair way he has designed and introduced this book. However, he has not persuaded me about the merits of inclusivism. And I worry about the similarities between his view and the religious pluralism regularly espoused in the liberal Protestant and Roman Catholic circles in which I move.

I begin my rejoinder with some agreements with Sanders:

1a. He is right in his attempt to find an alternative to current restrictivist views.

2a. He is right to face squarely the fact of billions on the planet who have never heard, and never will hear, the gospel in their lifetime.

3a. He is right in resisting the views of our secular and pluralist society that we Christians must now abandon our claims to the saving uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Sanders retains the "scandal of particularity" with regard to the person of Christ (Christ as truly God as well as truly human) and the *objective* work of Christ (Christ as the fundamental revealer and only reconciler).

4a. He is right to challenge the idea that general revelation works

only to condemn sinners. It has a larger purpose in the sustaining of creation under the covenant with Noah.

But there are serious problems here as well.

1b. In his opening sections on the New Testament, Sanders makes a good exegetical case for a "wider hope" and God's relentless love in seeking out sinners, but the passages discussed (the prodigal son, the messianic banquet, the sheep and the goats) have nothing to do with the specifics of his thesis that God offers an invitation to salvation through general revelation. Neither does the Old Testament reference to Pharaoh. With respect to Pharaoh, God uses powers, persons and events in world history for overall divine purposes (for example, Assyria as the "rod" of "God's anger"—Is 10:5), but there is no scriptural basis for claiming that the Assyrian and Egyptian kings whom God used were thereby offered personal salvation.

2b. John 3:16 declares that Jesus Christ came so we would not perish but have eternal life through belief in him. This bold affirmation of the way of personal salvation is found throughout the New Testament, as I have shown in my citations (p. 163). In the New Testament and in the classical Christian tradition, believing is not a generalized trust in God, but a trust in *Christ* and his saving work.

The standard definition of *faith* in Christian theology includes three things:

- ☐ *notitia,* the knowledge by our minds of Jesus Christ
- ☐ *assensus,* the assent of our wills to Jesus Christ
- ☐ *fiducia,* the trust of our hearts in Jesus Christ

Full-orbed, holistic faith does not eliminate any of these dimensions. Of course those who stress only mind knowledge and turn faith into a barren propositionalism should be criticized as reductionists, as Sanders rightly does. But it is equally wrong to reduce faith to a universal "faith principle" without knowledge of Christ.

A popular view in contemporary theology is called "experiential expressivism."[1] It holds that the holy can be experienced savingly by anyone, even though it may be expressed in a variety of different

religious or even humanistic ways. Sanders avoids this accommodation to modern pluralist ideology by his sturdy stress on the incarnation and atonement. While so marching to a different drummer on Christology and *objective* soteriology, he nevertheless falls in line with pluralism on *subjective* soteriology, eliminating the need of personal belief in Christ for salvation. This is not "christological heart failure," but it is "soteriological heart failure."

3b. In spite of Sanders's discussion of a "faith principle" that is a "trust" that does not require "information" about God—"God does not limit his goodness to us by our knowledge of him"—in his illustrations he has slipped in through the back door the necessity of *some* saving knowledge—the knowledge of a personal God. This contradicts the trust-without-knowledge refrain and also limits salvation to religions that teach belief in a personal God, thereby excluding the hundreds of millions who espouse nontheistic Buddhism, Confucianism and so on. How is this consistent, and how is it "inclusivism"?

The Scandal of Particularity

The Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner is known for his teaching of "anonymous Christianity." This idea has many parallels with John Sanders's inclusivism. Rahner holds to the scandalous particularity of Christ's unique person and saving work. Further, he avoids the charge of salvation by works by asserting that a universal grace (with its invisible source in Christ's person and work) can—with some cooperation—create an "implicit faith" within good people who do not know Christ. They can be saved by grace through this implicit faith, becoming thereby "anonymous Christians."

Rahner has been criticized for lassoing people into Christianity without their permission. But there is a much deeper problem here. It has to do with some missing chapters of the biblical story.

After God lovingly created the world, the Fall took the human race down. We lost our capacity to know and love God as we should. The whole point of salvation history—from the election of Israel through

God's coming in Christ to the birth of the church and the gift of faith—is to restore us to God by a special *saving* grace.

To anticipate that, to sustain the world until and outside of contact with its arrival, God gave to all people a *common* grace in Noah's covenant. This preserving and readying grace is no substitute for the rush of special grace—the grace of *salvation* history that, by definition, is explicit, knowing who its Redeemer is. That is the "scandal of particularity" in its deepest meaning, and why Christianity has always been an offense to human reason ("the Greeks") and a stumbling block to the moralists ("the Jews"—1 Cor 1:23).

These chapters in the biblical story—the Fall and Christ's saving grace/faith—do not seem fair by modern enlightened standards, especially when there are so many wise and good people out there who have never heard of Jesus! Indeed, such a confidence in human wisdom and virtue is one of the convictions of the Enlightenment period of modern history and the reason so many people today take offense at Christian claims to particularity.

Karl Rahner, for all his orthodoxy, is reflecting the influence of the Enlightenment. While anonymous Christians do not know their "absolute Savior," they can be OK before God, aided by a universal grace. Missing here is the Reformation realism about our universal Fall: nothing in us—by our own efforts, or in cooperation with common grace—can save our souls, only Christ alone, known through Scripture alone, given by grace alone, received by faith alone, the basic Reformation teachings.

Rahner is surely right that Christianity cannot be irrational or immoral, and therefore there must be a wisdom and justice in any understanding we have of the destiny of billions who do not get the message of Christ in their lifetime. But it cannot be at the price of editing out of the Christian story the scandal of particularity regarding the third *D*—the *deliverance* of the soul from sin and death that is bound up with knowledge of and trust in God's saving *deed* and *disclosure* in Jesus Christ.

Sanders must answer two key questions if he is to defend his evangelical version of Rahner's "anonymous Christianity":

☐ How has he avoided the editing of the biblical story that is apparent in "anonymous Christianity"?

☐ Where is the Reformation seriousness about our universal Fall that disqualifies any human experience as saving, outside of Christ's word to forgiven sinners?

Dealing with Old Testament Texts

Sanders gives attention to Old Testament texts that suggest the application of the saving work of Christ to those who do not know Jesus Christ. I have two responses to his treatment of these texts.

First, under the word *salvation* Cruden's *Concordance* lists two meanings: "[1] Preservation from trouble or danger. [2] Deliverance from sin and its consequences." The fifty-eight citations from the Old Testament that follow fall mainly, if not exclusively, in category 1—the deliverance of Israel, of individual Jews and even those outside Israel from their enemies, from miseries, oppression, sorrow. This is not deliverance from sin but deliverance from pain. Category 1 has to do with things in this world—*horizontal* salvation, so to speak—not with the *vertical* salvation of category 2, salvation of a sinner from the judgment of God.

God does deliver people from trouble as well as sin, and not only Jews and Christians. Such deliverance can come to those who live under the rainbow sign, the covenant with Noah. They may be saved by grace from "trouble and danger." "Common grace" in the latter case, therefore, is given to us for more than the condemnation of sin, yes, but short of salvation from sin.

Second, a long tradition in Christianity affirms the personal salvation of those with "Abrahamic" faith, based on Paul's deep discussion in Romans 4. Here, therefore, is a recognition of justification by faith before the knowledge of Christ. But this faith has to do with a response to the saving actions of God among a *chosen* people where the word

of mercy is uniquely given and heard. This is faith within the stream of salvation history, not a generalized "faith principle."

How is Abrahamic faith related to faith in Christ? We must read both Romans 4 and the reference to Old Testament believers canonically, with special attention to holding together the truth that "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9) with "so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

The ancient church fathers (Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus and others) who taught that believing Jews—the patriarchs—will learn *in the realm of the dead* that their Savior was Christ were on the right track. They were early exponents of divine perseverance. In this case, however, it did not have to do with the gospel preached for the first time to the unreached, but with the knowledge that the person and work of Jesus Christ are the source of Abrahamic faith.

John Sanders is right in what he affirms—the centrality of the incarnation and atonement, and God's universal will to save. I believe he is wrong in what he *denies;* for personal salvation is inseparable from the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Response to Sanders

RONALD H. NASH

THIS RESPONSE TO JOHN SANDERS'S CHAPTER ON INCLUSIVISM BEgins with an urgent appeal to the reader to ignore the rest of this material until you have first read my long chapter on restrictivism. There are two reasons for this. The limited space each respondent has been given means that important information you need to evaluate inclusivism appears only in my longer chapter. Second, you will be unable to understand the more important points in this response unless you have first read my more complete analysis in that other chapter. So I place several pause marks in my text to indicate that you should not read further until you complete your study of the longer chapter.

* * *

Inclusivism is a funny theory. The less you know about it, the more attractive it appears. But the closer you draw to it, the more warts and imperfections become obvious. John Sanders's chapter suggests his dislike of Christians who stress the importance of knowledge; he calls them gnostics, after one of the earliest Christian heresies. I suspect there are a number of things he doesn't want Christians to know about inclusivism.

I disagree with any theology that suggests that "ignorance is bliss."

I believe we ought to know everything we can about the Christian faith, including the absolutely inescapable role that knowledge plays in it. I also believe we ought to know everything we can about non-Christian religions, including all the features of those religions that make it so difficult in practice for their followers to satisfy Sanders's own conditions for inclusivist salvation. And finally, I believe we have a right to know a great deal more about elements of inclusivism that Sanders slips over much too quickly.

On Sanders's Handling of Scripture

Sanders's badly flawed handling of the Exodus material about Pharaoh is hardly incidental to his argument. It is perhaps the major part of his attempt to disqualify the abundant biblical support for restrictivism. Sanders believes the Exodus narrative shows "that God's love and grace were shown even to the pharaoh who was brutally oppressing the people of Israel." Indeed, Sanders insists, during the entire confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, God was doing his best[1] to bring Pharaoh to a saving relationship with himself. A careful examination of this material is important, for we will find this is hardly the only time when Sanders's handling of the biblical evidence looks suspiciously as if he is reading his theories into Scripture instead of drawing them out of the Bible.

Basic to Sanders's claims about God's best efforts to save Pharaoh is the contention that the Hebrew word for "know" in the relevant chapters "carries with it the idea of relational and redemptive knowledge." Sanders's procedure in all this is an example of a word-study fallacy known as "word-loading." This occurs when someone takes a meaning a word has in one context and seeks to import that same meaning into a quite different setting. It is true that the Hebrew word "to know" *(yāḏâh)* can refer to a "relational and redemptive knowledge" (see Jer 31:34). But the word certainly does not have that meaning in every context. In our passages in Exodus, the Hebrew word *kî* (that) follows the verb "to know" in the three instances Sanders cites

(Ex 7:5, 17; 8:10). This construction indicates not a personal knowledge but an objective knowledge of fact. The verses in question do not mean that God was seeking to bring Pharaoh into a personal relationship with him, but that after God's displays of power, Pharaoh will finally know that Yahweh is the true Sovereign and Lord. This is the same objective knowledge that lost sinners will have at the final judgment. The idea of God's seeking Pharaoh's salvation is completely absent from the Exodus account.

Sanders's contention that God's hardening the heart meant that God was really *strengthening* Pharaoh's heart is another example of word-loading. While the verb used *(ḥāzaq)* can mean "to strengthen," that sense is obviously not present in this context. Had God sought to strengthen Pharaoh's heart in that sense, positive results would have been apparent. Each incident of hardening is preceded by a statement of God's intention to do so, followed by the reporting of the hardening, followed by indications of Pharaoh's further resistance to God's purposes. Careful readers will easily detect the many indications of Pharaoh's disingenuous behavior and comments.

Ḥāzaq is clearly used in Exodus to indicate hardheartedness. The fact that the servants of Pharaoh were hardened and yet implored Pharaoh to release the Israelites means nothing in this respect. They merely wanted to be free of the plagues. There is no indication of repentance or belief on their part.

While the plagues occurred for redemptive purposes, that was not their ultimate end. Sanders misunderstands that God's glory is the goal of his work. The salvation of the righteous is always accompanied by divine retribution against the wicked. Jesus' words at the inauguration of his ministry indicate that he had not come to save everyone (Lk 4:24-28).

Sanders's comment about Jonah misses the point of the quoted verse. Naturally, believers should seek to evangelize unbelievers! We should view everyone as "potentially elect," since only God knows who the elect are.

When Sanders turns to the New Testament in an effort to counter the abundance of New Testament texts that teach restrictivism, the best he can do is appeal to parables like the story of the prodigal son and the king's son's wedding. Astute readers will recognize how tendentious his treatment of these passages is. Careful students of biblical interpretation know that literal and didactic passages take precedence over parabolic passages. A doctrine is clearly in trouble if the only support for it comes from unclear or parabolic passages.

Of equal interest is Sanders's failure to discuss the many New Testament passages that teach restrictivism. I am unaware of one place in his writings where Sanders deals with John 3:18: "Those who believe in him [Jesus] are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God." Nor does he ever address, to my knowledge, 1 John 5:12: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." And my chapter on restrictivism contains references to numerous other texts and arguments.

While we are busy disputing which of our three positions is true, let's not pretend that restrictivism lacks significant biblical support. Let's not try to rule all of that material out of court by presenting a questionable interpretation of God's dealings with Pharaoh along with one or two New Testament parables.

The Role of Knowledge in Salvation

Sanders admits that faith must include truth and knowledge.[2] Saving faith is impossible without true information about the object of that faith, in this case God. In Sanders's words, "Genuine faith in God contains some truth about God, whether that truth come from the Bible or from God's work in creation." This is fine, so long as Sanders does not subject this truth to the death of a thousand qualifications.

Sanders then raises the question of how much information is necessary in a saving relationship with God. Clearly anxious to avoid

any suggestion that this knowledge must include information about Jesus, Sanders asks, "Is it really knowledge that saves us, or is it God?" as though this specious disjunction might somehow be enlightening. And so he embarks on the task of denigrating the very kind of truth he has earlier described as an essential component of salvation.

Sanders even appeals to evangelical theologian J. Gresham Machen's statement "No one knows how little a person can believe and still be saved." This is disingenuous. Machen made his comment in the context of the debate between Protestant orthodoxy and liberalism in the first third of the twentieth century. All of the participants were thoroughly familiar with evangelical claims about the incarnation, virgin birth, atonement and resurrection of Christ. The issue addressed by Machen was not the total ignorance of the unevangelized pagan but the selective unbelief of Protestant liberals. There is no warrant for tearing Machen's quote and its meaning out of his original context and using it as a pretext for turning Machen into a closet inclusivist. Earlier I referred to the fallacy of "word-loading." This is an example of "quote-loading."

Sanders opposes the belief that human beings must possess certain kinds of objective knowledge as a necessary condition of entering into a trusting relationship with God.[3] He equates this position with gnosticism, an ancient heresy among other things.[4] This unpleasant claim seems strangely inconsistent with Sanders's oft-confessed desire to debate restrictivism in an irenic way. Dismissing one's opponents as gnostic heretics, an act buttressed by a significant distortion of their position, is hardly an exercise in conciliation. Additional questions arise once one realizes that under Sanders's unhistorical sense of the word *gnosticism,* Paul (Rom 10:9-10), John (Jn 20:30-31) and even Jesus (Mt 16:13-17) end up being gnostics, since all three regarded knowledge about Jesus as essential to salvation.

But, some may counter, am I not doing to Sanders what I claim he does to restrictivists—namely, distorting his position? After all, Sanders has admitted that faith does have some element of truth. Even if

this truth turns out to be negligible, even the tiniest amount of truth is still truth, isn't it? My answer to this very legitimate question lies in an attempt to show that certain easily overlooked aspects of Sanders's position strongly suggest that the unevangelized may possibly be saved with no knowledge or truth at all.

I began this response by suggesting that there are features of inclusivism that Sanders does not fully understand himself or may not want others to see. We are getting very close to what I have in mind.

The Content of General Revelation

General revelation could not be revelation unless it imparted some information. It goes without saying that this information must be true.

If we forget the present debate for a moment, what kind of information should we expect to find in general revelation? I suggest that any of the following propositions would qualify:

1. God exists.
2. This God created the physical universe.
3. This God is loving.
4. This God is personal, since love cannot characterize an impersonal deity.
5. This God is a moral being.[5]
6. We have violated the moral law and thus are guilty.
7. We have displeased the morally perfect God who is the source of the moral law.

While I lack the time to pursue the matter, Sanders's almost total blackout on the supposed content of general revelation strongly suggests he will not be happy about my seven plausible elements of that content. I believe there is a reason for this. Consider how the religious culture of a pantheist precludes the possibility of any serious consideration of the notion of a personal, sovereign, moral Creator God. For all of Sanders's talk about general revelation, I fail to see any signs that he interacts realistically with the ways antitheistic worldviews or cultures predispose people to reject the essential and relevant infor-

mation that is usually located in general revelation. In the moment when a pantheist, polytheist or animist begins to think seriously about the possible existence of one sovereign, personal Creator God, he or she has already taken a first step away from that religion. Does Sanders have any information that tells us this sort of thing happens very often, apart from the additional light of special revelation?

The Plot Thickens

It is now time to recall some points in Sanders's chapter that probably slipped past most readers. Sanders says, "The God of the Bible is utterly amazing; he includes all in his grace and excludes in judgment only those who spurn that grace. . . . Because of the work of Christ, God accepts all. Only those who decline to accept God's grace are rejected." Sanders is clearly stating that inclusivists claim the right to regard every single unevangelized person as already saved, unless and until that person chooses to reject divine grace.

Only if this assumption is made an essential part of inclusivism do the major holes in the rest of the system begin to close. Read Sanders's sentences again. Every human being is included in God's grace until that person spurns God's grace. Then and only then is he or she excluded from God's grace in judgment. It ought to be obvious that the only people who are ever in a position to spurn God's grace are those who have been evangelized and who choose to reject Christ. How can unevangelized persons possibly spurn God's grace, since by definition they are precluded from knowing anything about God's grace until after they have heard the gospel?

Sanders's words appear to set forth a new kind of universalism—a universalism for the unevangelized. It is a kind of universalism that admits only one possibility of perdition—namely, that which follows a rejection of the New Testament gospel. Given Sanders's clear statements, it is difficult to see how any unevangelized person could ever be lost.

My troubling discovery about the inner secret of Sanders's inclu-

sivism is supported by a statement he makes a bit later: "God reaches out to the unevangelized . . . via general revelation, conscience and human culture." General revelation and conscience, I take it, amount to pretty much the same thing. What interests me is his claim that God reaches out to the unevangelized through the medium of their human culture. It is impossible to understand properly any human culture without recognizing the central role that religion plays in that culture. Unless Sanders wants to state publicly that he used careless language here, are we not required to believe that he thinks God reaches out to the unevangelized through the medium of their non-Christian religions? Once we remember that this presents the scenario of the personal, sovereign, triune God of the Bible seeking to save the unevangelized through worldviews that are pantheistic, polytheistic, animistic and even atheistic, and that sometimes include idolatry and human sacrifice, don't we see a slight problem here?

Inclusivists love to tell us about their "faith principle" (Heb 11:6). We must never lose sight of the fact that even this minimal understanding of faith necessarily includes two beliefs: that God (that is, the triune, personal Creator God of Scripture) exists and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. How, one is compelled to ask, can a pantheist, polytheist, animist or atheist possibly satisfy the conditions of the inclusivists' own faith principle?

I began this response with the claim that the less one knows about inclusivism, the more attractive it appears, while the more one knows about inclusivism, the more troubling it becomes. With all due respect, it does appear that John Sanders and other inclusivists have a lot of explaining to do and a lot of holes in their argument to fill.

Divine Perseverance

GABRIEL FACKRE

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY THE GOSPEL WAS CARRIED FROM BOSton to the mid-Pacific Sandwich Islands, and thousands of Hawaiians were converted. After a while, however, a troubling question arose among the new Christians: "What will happen to our ancestors of blessed memory? They never heard the good news." Could the Congregational missionaries give them an answer?

In New England during the late 1800s, the subject of the unreached was much to the fore. Missionaries brought the Hawaiians' question back with them to the theologians, the churches, the clergy and the laity. Different answers were debated in church papers, on mission boards, in seminaries. The discussion became so heated that an artist for the famous New York magazine *Puck* drew a cartoon showing one group of professors pushing another group out of a boat, each brandishing their theories of salvation. Out of the controversy grew a point of view much like the one taken up here.[1]

This "postmortem" conviction, however, did not get its start just one hundred years ago. It appeared early in Christian history and has been advocated here and there ever since, especially when issues of evangelism or "pluralism" came front and center. Some great souls

have declared for it. And of course, those who believe that death is no barrier to Christ's pursuing the unreached hold that it can be found at the heart of the Bible.

Can this view, discussed so intensely in the missionary struggles of another age, have something to say to us today? Yes! While it has yet to achieve widespread recognition, like many other Christian teachings it needs "soaking time" for a clear picture to develop. It took four hundred years of christological controversies in the early centuries before Christians came to a mind on what Scripture says about the identity of Jesus Christ as "truly God, truly human, truly one."[2] And right now we are in the middle of a parallel churchwide conversation on the destiny of the unevangelized. There is no "knock-down" argument for any one position. We have to search the Scriptures and be in conversation with one another. This book is a step in that direction.

Our own issue is prompted by the experience of *today's* parishioners as well as by yesterday's missionaries. Through travel, communication and the increasing diversity of our society, we have come more and more into close contact with people of different religions and people of no religion at all. This is a world of billions of people, many of whom never hear the gospel. How then can Christ say: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6)? The question is urgent. Will the church come to a common mind on this after a while, as it did on the person of Christ?

Divine Perseverance

One sign of an unsettled question is how varied the ways are of talking about it. The names were shifting (and complicated!) in the debates of the first four centuries about who Jesus really is in relation to God. A string of movements that stressed Jesus' humanity but played down his divinity arrived on the scene with their pet terms and ideas: Ebionism, Adoptionism, Arianism and others. And then there were the

opponents who stressed the divinity of Christ but neglected the Scripture's teaching that he also was a real human being: Docetism, Apollinarianism, Monophysitism and so on.

We have the same varieties of names and factions on the subject at hand, the destiny of the unreached. The labels for the view to be discussed here are many. It is variously called "future probation," "second probation," "eschatological evangelism," "postmortem evangelism" and "PME."

We need a name that better expresses the main conviction of this point of view. So here it will be called *divine perseverance.* Of course evangelicals have heard about the "doctrine of perseverance."[3] That old idea has to do with the perseverance of the *saints,* true believers given the power never to backslide. This one has to do with the perseverance of *God.* For God is resolute, never giving up on getting the Word out. In this world God will give us the power to spread the gospel far and wide. But the Word will also be declared to those we can't reach, even if it takes an eternity. I am convinced the poet Francis Thompson had it right—Christ is the "Hound of Heaven," pursuing us to the end.

Learning from Our Forebears

An evangelical case for a Christian teaching rests on Scripture, and thus I will defend divine perseverance by a careful look at the biblical evidence. But first we have to be clear about *how* the Bible is rightly read. Scripture tells us that Scripture can be quoted in the wrong way (Mt 4:5-6). So let's take a longer path to our destination, dealing with a few important preliminaries on the "how" before we consider the "what" of the matter. We'll get some help on this from the great debates about the person of Christ.

One thing those debates taught us about the interpretation of the Bible was the importance of "the analogy of faith." That is, Scripture has to interpret Scripture. Since the Bible has an overall unity in its teaching, we'll get help on difficult passages when we compare them

with analogous ones that are clearer. Therefore we have to read any one part of the Bible in the light of the whole Bible, the "canon" of all the accepted books. This is a canonical approach based on the belief that the God who inspired the Scripture is of one mind. The true meaning of a passage cannot be out of sync with the rest of the Bible's teaching. When I come to investigate some crucial passages about divine perseverance, I shall do it canonically, with the help of overall biblical teaching.

Another, very similar insight from the early centuries is that not only *texts* but also *teachings* hang together. (Actually, it's hard to separate texts from teachings.) What is true in one doctrine sheds light on what is the case about others. In some circles of theology then (and now), "analogy of faith" meant just that—tracing out the harmony of all Christian teachings.

An example of that harmony is the relationship of the person of Christ to the Trinity. The two doctrines developed parallel to one another. Church thinkers of that day reasoned that the Son is a person "of the same substance" as the person of the Father—so said the Nicene Creed in A.D. 325. Again, they concluded from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is not just an impersonal power but also a personal Subject. That would make God three separate Subjects. But God cannot be three separate Gods—that's polytheism! The God of the Bible is *one* God. The persons are so intimate, so mutual ("coinherent" as the fathers put it, in one loving life together—1 Jn 4:8), that the Three are really One, the *triune* God of classical Christian faith. Thus what is taught about the person of Christ (that Christ is God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit) has to fit with what is taught about God (God is One). True doctrines will be harmonious, integrated with one another and shedding light on one another.

Following this lead of seeing how one doctrine sheds light on another, I will compare the question of the unreached to another knotty Christian issue, the *problem of evil.* These two issues have many similarities. The same fundamental teachings of Scripture that have

to fit together to address the problem of evil have to mesh in our question. And the history of the debate about theodicy, as the problem of evil is called, has produced parties very similar to those found in the debate about the destiny of the unreached.

Divine Perseverance and the Problem of Evil

Theodicy poses this question: How do you justify the ways of God in a world so full of evil? This comes up for Christians day in and day out when we see the suffering of people who don't seem to deserve it. In the face of these agonies, how can a believer hold together three basic, nonnegotiable, biblical teachings: (1) God is almighty, (2) God is loving and all-good, and (3) evil is real?

The popular "solutions" to this mystery—which are, in the end, no solution—have a common tendency. Each *eliminates* one of the basics. You've heard all the answers:

1. Yes, God is all-good and evil is utterly real, but God is not almighty. Evil things happen that even God can't deal with. God is powerful, but not all-powerful. You've got to live with these limitations as best you can and accept the unfair suffering of the innocent. Rabbi Harold Kushner has given this view high profile in our day in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People.*

The reality of evil and the goodness of God are taken seriously here. But what happened to God almighty?

2. Yes, God is almighty, presiding over everything, justly punishing evil and rewarding good. Where there is suffering, there is a reason for it. While it doesn't seem just, it's part of the plan. Accept it and learn to live with it. Job's counselors sounded this note.

The power of God is stressed here, and so is the reality of evil. But what happened to the love and goodness of God?

3. Yes, God is almighty and all-good. In this kind of a world with this kind of a God, what looks like evil can't really be that. You have to change your attitude, see things in their true light. Christian Science is a variation on this theme of misperception.

The love and goodness of God are stressed here, and the power of God is assumed. But what happened to the reality of evil?

There are many parallels between the solutions offered to the problem of evil and those proposed on the question of the unevangelized. Here are the sorts of answers offered to the latter:

1. One view puts a big emphasis on the goodness and love of God and counts on the power of God to back them up. The world is made up so that everybody in some way will find out what is right and then do the right thing. It will turn out that way because a loving God would not condemn anybody. This doctrine is called universalism. It holds that everyone will finally be saved.

But if everyone is saved, what happened to the reality of evil?

2. Another view stresses divine power and also takes account of the reality of evil. Because God is all-powerful, things will be settled on God's terms. That can mean either that the Almighty chooses some to be saved ahead of time and passes over the rest (leaving them in their sins) or that God restricts the offer of good news to some, denying it to others. These are variations on a "restrictivist" view.

But if some are arbitrarily excluded, what happened to the goodness of God?

3. Another view stresses the goodness of God and the reality of evil by giving everyone a chance for a decision for Christ in this world. If they are prevented from knowing Christ directly, they will be given a choice indirectly, through another kind of knowledge of good and evil. This is an "inclusivist" view.

But if worldly limits are set to when and how Christ can work, what happened to the power of God?

Of course neither the question of theodicy nor that of the unevangelized can be settled by these generalities. But they do tell us something. An opinion may fix on an important truth but ignore or reject other truths. In fact, in this case, positions 1, 2 and 3 may be *right* in what each affirms, but *wrong* in the one point each denies. These right but reductionist perspectives push us to look for a bigger

picture that includes all three of the nonnegotiables.

Divine perseverance is key to getting this bigger picture on both the problem of evil and the problem of the unreached. Let's look at the parallels and then go from this general discussion to the scriptural evidence.

Theodicy and Divine Perseverance

None of the three basics can be eliminated. But one of them has been misunderstood: *the power of God.*

Our fallen human nature often tempts us to let our surrounding society's ideas wander into our reading of the Bible. For a long time, *power* in the world outside of the faith has had a take-charge ring to it. In the old days, kings and emperors ran things with an iron hand. They were the way the world understood power. In our time, power (on TV and in the movies, for example) is understood in a similar fashion—symbolized, for example, by the "Terminator"!

The secular idea of power as instant-and-everywhere domination of things too often gets read into what the gospel means by *God's* power, both in the old days and in our time. Yes, power does mean the ability to win through, to achieve the goal. But God's power does not work the way human power works. Instead, "God's *weakness* is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:25). The power of God is the power of the cross. As Christians, we get our understanding of power—and everything else we believe about ultimate reality, for that matter—not from "human wisdom" (1 Cor 1:25) but from the Word of God—the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ as testified to by the biblical Word.

When we come at the problem of evil from this angle, things look very different. The "power of God" has nothing to do with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Yes, God's whole being is set against evil. Yes, nobody is going to get away with anything. But no, God does not treat us as things to be pushed around. We are given an *invitation* to say yes or no to God's will. "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh

24:15). The whole history of salvation we read about in Scripture is the story of God's quest to win us, the divine perseverance that relentlessly pursues us, calling for our response. And it's a tale of our nay-saying, with all the destructive consequences that follow. Not only human beings but also the "powers and principalities" are bent on going their own way.

At the very center of this story, God makes the decisive move to turn the world around: in the conception, birth, life, preaching and teaching, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. His incarnation and atonement determine and disclose how it will all, finally, turn out. There's a "great day comin' "! In that kingdom every wrong will be righted, every flaw mended, and God will "be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

No wonder we read Romans 8 at Christian burials. We declare then for a final victory in the *future* tense: nothing "*will* be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord": "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation" (Rom 8:39, 38).

What comes clear here is that the power of God is, mysteriously, the way of the cross, the "weakness of God." The ultimate power is not machismo but the divine vulnerability. That means God does not run roughshod over us, but allows the world to range about in its rebellion—even to the point of crucifying the Son of God. Suffering and evil do have their day in the great drama that is unfolding in our midst.

God's love is *patient* and *persistent.* It outlasts us. It is a "weakness" that is stronger than our rebellion. God's weakness is a powerful powerlessness, a victorious vulnerability.

For the final victory of this powerful patience, however, we must await the end of the story. Only then will the kingdom come—the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, final judgment and everlasting life. In the end, God will settle accounts, vindicate the sufferer and validate the divine purposes.

For believers, Easter morning is the demonstration of the coming reign of God. Confidence in the risen Christ and the kingdom to come empowers us to stand fast against the powers of evil, and struggle with, and live through, the suffering that is part and parcel of a world still short of the end. A strong eschatology makes for a deep piety and a powerful ethics.

Christians live by hope in the eschatological power of God, an almightiness that establishes itself on God's patient and persistent terms in the last things, rather than on our impatient timetable. To that God of power and love—in the face of the world's worst evil—be all the honor and glory!

The Unevangelized and Divine Perseverance

Eschatological theodicy—the divine perseverance in bringing together the goodness and power of God in the face of evil— has its counterpart in *eschatological evangelism*—the divine perseverance in bringing together the goodness and power of God in the face of the unreached.

Evangelicals have a passion for souls. The good news changes lives. We have found "a pearl of great price" and want to share it. The Word comes: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). And because the world cannot "hear without someone to proclaim him" (Rom 10:14), the messengers go out with the gospel.

But our question here is, What of those we *do not* reach—those who by circumstance are denied the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

To believe in divine perseverance is to be confident that the reality of evil, the goodness of God and the power of God are biblical nonnegotiables. In Jobian theodicy, *evil* has reference to the problem of suffering. In "evangelistic theodicy," it is the problem of the unreached. How can we justify the existence of the unevangelized? Given a loving and all-powerful God, how can sinners who need

salvation receive it if they don't hear the good news? Any answer to this question has to do justice to all three of the biblical basics—the *reality of evil,* the *goodness of God,* the *power of God.*

The answer has to do with the same story that speaks to the problem of evil, the narrative of God's persistent and powerful love. The three basics are the same. They have to be held together.

1. Evil is real. In this case, evil goes back to original sin. Sin is universal—"there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom 3:10). Sin is too deep for our best moral and spiritual efforts. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). We stand exposed before the majesty of God for what we are. Only something and Someone not our own can change the picture. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13).

2. God is all-loving and good. "There is a balm in Gilead that makes the wounded whole." In Jesus Christ, the good God has entered our sin-sick world. In the life, death and resurrection of Christ the powers of sin, evil and death have met their match. On the cross, Jesus Christ took the punishment for our sins. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6).

In biblical teaching, especially emphasized in the Reformation tradition, the forgiveness of sin, accomplished on the cross alone, is imparted to us by the grace of Christ alone and received by us through faith in Christ alone. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).

The "decision for Christ," so central to evangelical piety and belief, is inseparable from all of this. God gives us access to Calvary's saving work through the personal response of faith in Jesus Christ. As all-loving, the One who went to the wall—to the cross—for us will leave no stone unturned to get this message out.

3. God is almighty. The saving love of God in Jesus Christ presupposes the *power* of God. But a special form of power is associated with our third nonnegotiable. Being almighty, the One who created the world and defeated sin, evil and death in the person and work of

Christ can "do all things." No limits can be set to the triune God, except self-chosen limits. The divine love and power call the church into being to spread the good news. God's tender love places the treasure of the gospel "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7 KJV), risking the proclamation of the Word in this world on evangelizers like us—"the weak things of the world" (1 Cor 1:27 KJV). And God's powerful powerlessness sustains the church in its mission, sending it to the very ends of the earth.

The reality of sin and our creatureliness enter to limit the range of the church's mission in time and space. We have not gotten the Word out to the last and the least. Yet the goodness of God will not relent in the face of these realities. And the power of God breaks through their limitations. The gates of death, as well as the "gates of hell," cannot prevail against the divine perseverance. The powerful love of God assures that the saving Word will be proclaimed to those who have not heard it, even beyond the gates of death.

Because God's is a powerful *powerlessness,* no one is going to be forced to accept the offer. God's power is so great that it can restrain the very imposition of itself on those it seeks out. Yes, the love of God "desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). While the power of God will patiently *persist* in that desire, it will not *insist* upon our compliance. We are free to say no into eternity itself. To demand that God save everyone—universalism—is to violate both the freedom of God and human freedom.

Divine perseverance so understood holds together the three basics involved in the question of the unreached. It's an example of the "analogy of faith" at work in Christian teaching, the harmonizing of basic Christian beliefs. But can we actually find this view of divine perseverance in the pages of the Bible?

Divine Perseverance in Scripture

First Peter. Those who have believed deeply in God's unlimited power and love to reach the unreached have returned again and again to 1 Peter

3:19-20 and 4:6. I begin this look at the biblical evidence with these much-discussed texts, expanding them to include the chapters in which they appear and the setting of the letter as a whole. As one commentator says about 3:19-20, "These verses have been called the most difficult in the N.T."[4] My search for their meaning will include what is often missing in the explanation of these verses: "the analogy of faith" as a canonical reading of texts in Scripture.

All commentators agree that the question uppermost in the mind of the author of 1 Peter is the suffering of the early church.[5] Its members asked, "How come we, as the people of God, have all this suffering?" In the letter, then, there is a striking combination of the two problems we have been discussing: the problem of evil and the problem of the unreached. And the way 1 Peter addresses both is by proclaiming God's persevering love and power beyond the doors of death.

The response of 1 Peter to the first question—Christian theodicy—is: Look at Jesus—he suffered and triumphed. Take courage. If he suffered and overcame, you can too. As God raised him from the dead, so God will vindicate you.

> By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-4)

Eschatological vindication is the answer to the agony of innocent suffering, suffering "for doing good" (3:17). This is the same point made earlier in my discussion of the problem of evil. The word is: "Christian, persevere, because God perseveres, overcoming suffering and death by the power of the resurrection in the end."

In the midst of 1 Peter's witness of things to come, based on the reality of the crucified and risen Lord, appear the verses under study. They also speak of the death and resurrection of Christ, of "the living and the dead,"

of Christ's dealings with the dead. Could these verses be addressed to the same question posed to the Hawaiian missionaries?

In the third chapter, Peter urges believers to stick to their convictions in spite of persecutions. After all, "Christ also suffered" (v. 18), going all the way for us. As an example of this divine perseverance, the writer then cites Christ's determination to breach the very walls of death to make a "proclamation to the spirits in prison" (v. 19). Christ's implacable power and love will persist to and through the final barrier of death. Even this last enemy is not strong enough to prevent the declaration of the Word.

Who were these prisoners? They were the dead who "in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah" (v. 20). They were not among the chosen few, "eight persons . . . saved through water" (v. 20); the flood, however, prefigured "baptism, which . . . now saves you" (v. 21). Read canonically (Gen 5:28—10:32), the reference is to those outside of God's special saving history in Israel and Christ—human beings who, since Noah and right up to the present moment and into the future, are accountable to the patient God. They are accountable through what our forebears called "the Noahic covenant."

What is the covenant with Noah symbolized by the rainbow? After the creation of the world and its fall, "the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth" (Gen 6:5). God put up with the worst the world could do, even waiting "patiently in the days of Noah" (1 Pet 3:20). Then judgment descended. Nevertheless, the long-suffering patience of God persisted. It manifested itself in the special grace toward Noah and family, "saved through water" (1 Pet 3:20), anticipating the baptizing church. But more, the rainbow "sign of the covenant" was given between God "and every living creature of all flesh" (Gen 9:12, 15). God promised to sustain the world even in its waywardness. Of a piece with that promise was knowledge of the rules for life together on earth (Gen 8:16—9:7), given by God to Noah and all his descendants.

The covenant of Noah is therefore a gift and a demand. God is

gracious, sustaining the world even in the face of its continuing rebellion. As part of that promise, God gives the world an awareness of what it takes to make life livable. In theological language, this universal gift and expectation is called "general revelation": enough small light to live by, even though it is regularly ignored because "the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (Gen 8:21).

On the basis of divine patience and its subsequent Noahic covenant, "Gentiles . . . living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry . . . will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Pet 4:3, 5). But the graciousness of God is such that *even these,* failing to live up to the rainbow light they are given (sinners "judged in the flesh as everyone is judged"), will not be denied the good news proclaimed to all sinners—"for this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead" (1 Pet 4:6). Sinners who die outside the knowledge of the gospel will not be denied the hearing of the Word.

These verses in 1 Peter 4 correlate exactly with those in 1 Peter 3. As in chapter 4 the dead hear the gospel, in chapter 3 those in the past who had the light of general revelation and even then "did not obey" will not be refused Christ's ultimate Word of judgment and forgiveness.

The gospel that announces God's offer to forgive the sinner goes against every human instinct. As Paul says, it contradicts our reason, being "foolishness to Gentiles," and it goes against our sense of righteousness, being "a stumbling block to Jews" (1 Cor 1:23). Christ's offer of mercy to sinners in the *here and now* is as offensive to human wisdom as is Christ's proclamation of the gospel to sinners in the *hereafter.* But in both cases "God's foolishness" (1 Cor 1:25) outwits us, and the justice of God outruns our standards of justice as the divine perseverance leaps over every boundary.

If in this life alone human beings have hope, then we are miserable indeed (1 Cor 15:19). But such is not the lot of those born out of time or place. To them also comes the good news of Jesus Christ. "To him

be the power forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet 5:11).

John and Paul with Peter. The Gospel of John as well as the first letter of Peter addresses concerns about the unevangelized. It assures us that there are "other sheep that do not belong to this fold," and it knows of a Christ who promises that "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). That voice will surely sound through those who travel the length and breadth of the world to preach the gospel.

And what of those unreached by the most determined efforts of our evangelism? Does the voice of Christ go silent before them? In John a firm no is said to all our delimited maps and timetables: "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25).

Paul adds his testimony to that of Peter and John, speaking of the freedom of Christ to cross the lines we like to draw. So he takes to the heights those he has brought from the depths:

> Therefore it is said,
>
> "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
> he gave gifts to his people."
>
> When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? (Eph 4:8-9)

Jesus Christ is Lord of both the depths and the heights and is free to bring those he calls from one to the other. He will descend to the depths of death to achieve his purposes. The same presence, freedom and regency of Christ in the place of death spoken of here are echoed in parallel passages elsewhere in the New Testament (Mt 12:40; Rom 10:7; Phil 2:10; Rev 1:18; 5:13; 21:25).

The biblical story. Specific passages and verses can make a case for the reach of Christ's Word beyond the boundaries of death. But we are brought to those texts, and gain light from them, because they are part of the larger sweep of the biblical story. That narrative tells of God's resolute will to reconcile a rebel world. It is about "God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowl-

edge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4).

God's desire to save—with our freedom to resist—*is* the "story line" of Scripture, clear at every turn of the tale, from creation to Fall, to the covenants with Noah and Israel, to the person and work of Jesus Christ, to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church, in the redeemed, and on the world, and finally to the consummation of all things in the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, the final judgment and everlasting life in the reign of God.[6]

The sweep of this story shows us that God's pursuit of the divine purpose is indefatigable. The "long-suffering" One will not give up on us. In each chapter of the Great Story—chapters that have subsequently become the great doctrines of the church: anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology—a *divine* perseverance is at work. Of a piece with this grand drama of salvation is the will of God to have all "come to the knowledge of the truth." The last and least, in time and eternity, will not be overlooked or denied access to the saving Word of Jesus Christ.

Divine Perseverance in the Early Centuries

The biblical pattern of God's patient pursuit was taken up by believers in the early centuries. Increasing attention was paid to biblical texts that pointed to an "intermediate state" and the descent of Christ into the realm of the dead. The latter subsequently found its way into the Apostles' Creed.

The summary of this volume's editor, John Sanders, in his comprehensive study of the question of the unevangelized says it best. Sanders begins by quoting H. D. MacCullough:

> "From at least the second century there was no more well-known and popular belief, including the Descent to Hades, the overcoming of Death and Hades, the Preaching to the Dead, and the Release of Souls, and its popularity steadily increased" (*The Harrowing of Hell,* p. 45). That the doctrine was taken for granted by A.D. 150 is evident from the fact that the heretics Marcion and the Valentinians,

> who were criticized on most of their beliefs by the early Church Fathers, were not challenged at all on this point. Both the early Fathers and the heretics agreed that Christ descended into hell. . . . It can be concluded from this that the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell and the release of souls therefrom was established by the end of the first century. The only question this time involved *who* was released.[7]

Divine Perseverance in Modern Times

Modern times means our own day and age of expanded horizons, the realization of how big and diverse the world is. The scholars call it the Age of Enlightenment, an age that began two hundred years ago when science and industry, travel and communication, knowledge and criticism of things past, and expectations about the future all underwent a great spurt forward. The overseas ventures of the nineteenth-century missionaries, and their theological quandaries earlier mentioned, were part of that new world. With it came the church's effort to respond to the questions posed by "modernity."

One such response was some missionaries' view of divine perseverance. They thought along the same lines as the early church fathers, faced now with the same religious pluralism but increased a thousandfold by contact with new cultures and faiths across the sea and around the world. But the New England travelers were not alone. European theologians, responding to the Enlightenment's demand to cross new mental boundaries rather than the missionaries' physical ones, were asking about the divine love and justice. How could God be fair to the countless millions before and since Christ who never heard the saving Word? Could the hard teaching of Scripture still be believed: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)?

Christian traditions that stressed the necessity of personal belief were the hardest put to answer this question. This included the evangelicals with their missionary passion, as was the case with the

New England Congregationalists. And the question also troubled many in the mainline churches, especially those influenced by Martin Luther. If "justification by faith" is at the heart of the matter, as Luther said, then God must make possible to all the response of justifying faith. And if "faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17), then everyone must have the chance to hear the Word. It was not long before Isaac Dorner, Julius Mueller and others began to turn their attention to the texts we have discussed.[8] And their exegesis, drawing on the work of some of the nineteenth century's leading interpreters of 1 Peter—biblical scholars Plumptre, Olahansen, Meyer, Godet, Alford, Smith[9]—came to similar conclusions: the divine perseverance sets before each of us "the ways of life and death," if not in this world, then in the next.

Though traditional Roman Catholicism was challenged and criticized by Luther's clarion call to "justification by faith alone,"[10] personal response has always been part of Catholic teaching as well. In the Catholic realm the question of the destiny of the evangelized began to show up in the nineteenth century (under some of the same pluralistic influences) in a teaching that came later to be called "final option." It could not be the same as the Protestant teaching about divine perseverance after death (named in those days "future probation") because of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. That doctrine allows for the postmortem change of destiny only for those with smaller sins—"venial sin," not eternal-life-and-death sins or "mortal sin." That is, death is the end of all opportunity for choices that affect the alternative between heaven and hell. However, prominent nineteenth-century Catholic theologians like Cardinal Newman began to speak of the *moment* of death itself as a time of encounter with Christ by all people, believers and those who never knew him, a "final fundamental option." Added by most of these interpreters was the idea that what a person did before that with his or her life counted toward how the final decision for Christ would be made (a notion hard for Protestants to hold because of their belief that sin is so thoroughgoing that only a graced faith in Christ can save).

As religious pluralism becomes more pervasive, the teaching of a moment at death of final decision grows in Roman Catholic circles, competing with the notion of "anonymous Christianity" (those who do not know Christ can be saved by following their best lights, and those who do so are therefore Christians without knowing it).[11]

The Reformed tradition with its emphasis on the divine sovereignty had less to say about all this. It has stressed *God's* choices, not ours. In the strictest forms of Calvinism, God's eternal decree of double predestination decides things. In variations of this emphasis on the divine majesty and initiative, Reformed teaching can, ironically, be used to support universalism: the divine will settles everything, for what God desires, God does (1 Tim 2:4). In more subtle formulations, such as that of Karl Barth, the matter has been settled *in principle* for all by the universal saving act on Calvary, but remains to be applied *in fact* as God chooses. That divine decision could go either way, although we have a right to hope for universal salvation.[12]

An interesting example of Reformed efforts to keep a stress on divine sovereignty while facing nineteenth-century questions of divine love for those who are unevangelized appears in the thinking of Princeton theologians Charles Hodge and Benjamin Warfield. For them it was the question of what happens to the multitudes who die in infancy. The answer given was that the benefits of Christ are applied automatically by the sovereign will of God to all those who never reach the age of discretion.[13] Of course this is not exactly the same as our question. But it does reflect the nineteenth-century Christian encounter with "fair-play" questions about those who do not hear the Word.

The twentieth century—the brothers and sisters of the present who join the fathers and mothers of the past—has had many proponents of divine perseverance among both evangelicals and "ecumenicals." The concern of today's evangelicals is deeply connected to their strong belief in evangelism, as it was among their nineteenth-century missionary forebears. Ecumenicals come at the issue more from the

direction of religious pluralism, as did their Enlightenment-preoccupied predecessors.

Donald Bloesch is a well-known evangelical who holds to the view I am calling divine perseverance.[14] Ecumenical theologian John Macquarrie comes out for a version of this position.[15] And there are many others.[16]

The Covenant with Noah: Amplifications

In both Scripture and tradition, the earlier-mentioned covenant with Noah has an important bearing on the question before us. So let's return to that covenant.

In Judaism, the rainbow promise has reference to the light given to those outside God's special saving covenant with the Jewish people. That is, God will judge human beings—Christians included—by the response they make to the universal hints of what is true and good and holy given from Noah's time on. God pledged the same by the rainbow sign and will follow through.[17]

In Christian teaching the same belief is held, but it is understood and applied differently. Given our fallen world, "special revelation" of the will and ways of God is required. It comes decisively in the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise in the saving person and work of Jesus Christ. But also God "has not left himself without a witness" (Acts 14:17) to those outside the range of these special deeds and words. Here, in "general revelation," is the way for the world to "search for God and perhaps grope for him" (Acts 17:27).

Our first biblical clue of this "common grace" given in and to all creation comes up in Genesis 5. God gives to "all flesh" an awareness of basic moral and spiritual standards and expectations—don't shed the blood of humankind, for it is made in the divine image (Gen 9:6-7); know and love your Creator and Sustainer (Gen 11:1-9). How much we honor these graces of preservation is shown in the very moments of their being given, as in Noah's own conduct (Gen 9:20-27) and in people's succumbing to the temptation to build our towers of Babel

(Gen 11:1-9). Yet even this ingratitude does not turn aside God's promise and good gifts of providential light and love.

God's fidelity to the covenant with Noah, in the face of our wandering ways, is yet another manifestation of divine perseverance. Thus the doctrine we are exploring has a temporal as well as an eternal expression. In *this* world, as well as the next, God does not give up on us. But we must be clear about what that divine faithfulness entails and see how the common grace of God given to all flesh relates to the particular grace of God in the one Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

The covenant with Noah is not the end of the tale. Its purpose is to keep the biblical story going forward. Its promise is to sustain creation with enough power and light for the great drama to be played out—the election of Israel, the coming of our Lord and Savior, and finally the consummation of all things. The Noahic covenant is necessary to restrain the world from the self-destruction to which we sinners might drive it by our arrogance and animosities. We desperately need this common grace to make and keep life human.

Read from the angle of the New Testament, Jesus Christ himself is party to the covenant with Noah. The Triune God is the author and sustainer of this work that saves the world from its own self-inflicted wounds. Thus the Son, as well as the Father and the Spirit, is the giver of the gift of common light, "the light, which enlightens everyone" (Jn 1:9).

The famous story of the sheep and the goats puts things in this perspective. Simple, basic acts of compassion, actions that relieve the miseries of human life—feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner—are given an unexpected interpretation by Christ: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). In this story, those who did not know they were dealing with Christ—"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food . . . ?" (Mt 25:37)—had to be told. Christ is present "incognito" in these acts of

care and concern. The good-Samaritan love of the New Testament here expresses the standards of the Old Testament's covenant with Noah, deeds of mercy and justice that make human life livable.

When the covenant with Noah is so honored, human life is saved from hate and hurt, from suffering, sickness, misery, pain, violence. Cruden's venerable concordance of the Bible recognizes this other dimension where it adds to the standard meaning of salvation, "deliverance from sin and its consequences," a second definition—"preservation from trouble or danger"—and lists all the Scripture references to both kinds of salvation. In the Bible, not only are persons saved from sin and guilt, but persons, cities and nations are saved from the sicknesses, sorrows and sufferings of this life. The latter is "horizontal" salvation—before and in the midst of temporal things. The former is "vertical" salvation—how you and I stand before the eternal God. Both are salvation by grace alone, not by our good works. And both are by Christ alone! In human affairs, we are saved by the grace of Christ from the miseries of this world. In divine affairs, we are saved by the grace of Christ from our sin and guilt before God.

We can't confuse these two dimensions of Christ's saving work. Our horizontal attitudes and acts of love are *always* short of what they might be, always frail and flawed by our sin. Therefore they cannot justify us vertically—before God. The rules for living that we know from the universal covenant with Noah, and the promise of a common grace that goes with them, are enough to make life livable. But they are *not* enough for the salvation of souls before God. Instead they expose us for who we are; the "law" does not save us from sin but judges us. We need a Savior. Hence the sequel to the covenant with Noah, the crowning covenant in Jesus Christ. So too the particular grace of the gospel that evokes the justifying faith in Calvary's cross: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Christ came to rescue us from the death that is "the wages of sin."

That stunning offer is made to "everyone who believes" the good Word of God's deed of redemption in Jesus Christ. Faith comes from *hearing* this Word, "and what is heard comes from the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Personal salvation—our righteousness before the holy God—is inseparable from hearing, believing and confessing Jesus Christ: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Rom 10:10-11). The evidence from Scripture that hearing, believing and confessing the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ is integral to personal salvation is overwhelming. John 3:16—"whoever *believes in him*"—is echoed throughout the New Testament.[18]

As noted earlier, a canonical interpretation of biblical truth searches for the pattern of teaching found throughout Scripture. Here is a manifest one that supports the inseparability of personal salvation from personal belief, and thus the necessity of hearing the gospel proclaimed. The divine perseverance will not deny the saving Word to any, and will contest all the makers of boundaries, including the final boundary, "the last enemy, death."

Evangelism: Affirmations

If a patient and pursuing Christ can call in eternity those who have not heard the gospel in time, why the need to proclaim the gospel to all the world? Doesn't eschatological evangelization cut the nerve of mission? The answer is a resounding "No!"

Why does any Christian want to share the gospel—especially those of evangelical faith? For one, or all, of these three reasons:

1. As we have found treasure, a "pearl of great price," we just can't keep quiet about it. "Come over here! See what we have found! It's for you too!"

Once the Word of salvation has come to us, something inside of us (the Holy Spirit) opens our mouths. We want to share the good news.

We have "a story to tell to the nations." A basic motivation for evangelism is this joy in the Lord. We've heard the good news, and we want to pass it on. No belief in the divine perseverance after death is going to still this story.

2. Yet it is we *sinners* saved by grace who do the passing on. We are still in this mortal frame with all its troubles and temptations. Joy in the Lord is not a constant twenty-four-hour state. Along with those times of spontaneous sharing of the faith, there are other times when we have to be reminded of our responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

So evangelism is a duty as well as a joy. We do it because we are told to do it. Our hope for those we cannot reach in this life does not affect one whit our need to obey Matthew 28:19 here and now: "Go . . . make disciples of all nations."

3. Christians are thinking people. They can put two and two together. They experience joy in the Lord and all the other marvelous fruits of the Spirit: "love . . . peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). they know the countless spiritual benefits that come from life in the church and personal communion with Christ. How much richer is life *in this world* when one has the confidence and consolations of the gospel!

Here is yet another motivation for evangelism. While the unreached will not be denied the Word of eternal salvation in the world to come, its blessings are the fruit of an evangelism that shares it with them in the here and now.

Divine Mystery

This last point raises a question. The teaching of divine perseverance goes a long way toward demonstrating the love and justice of God toward the unreached. The divine goodness will not abandon them. The divine justice will keep faith with them. They will not be denied the offer of eternal salvation. But point 3 above acknowledges that those unreached by evangelism in this world will not have the temporal benefits of the good news. This does not square with our standards

of compassion and fair play. While the blessings of eternity are not foreclosed, those of time are.

Like the question of theodicy with which I began, so here in these matters of the unreached there is still a loose end. As in theodicy, so in eschatological evangelization: the shadow of mystery as well as the light of understanding attend our best efforts. Every other attempt at a solution—"universalism," "restrictivism," "inclusivism" and so on—leaves us with similar puzzles. (Far more darkness in those cases, I believe, than the traces of shadow here!)

This tells us something about the love and justice of God: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD" (Is 55:8). We cannot catch God in the nets of human logic. This is true of all basic Christian doctrines—creation, the covenant with Israel, the person and work of Christ, the nature and mission of the church, salvation and the consummation of all things. Everywhere we run into paradoxes, mysteries that can be explored but not explained.

Indeed, one is mixed right in with the issues of evangelism, what some call the "paradox of grace."[19] On the one hand we affirm that a *decision* of faith is necessary for salvation, while on the other we insist that we are not saved by works—not even our work/decision of faith! We can make that act of faith only by the grace of God. Here is a paradox that we can't sort out with our feeble human reason. It is true because Scripture says so (Paul says, for example, "I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me"—1 Cor 15:10). And that truth is confirmed by the Spirit within us as we take on the burden of our free decision for Christ, yet after the fact recognize that it was "the grace of God that is with me."

I have sought to probe as deeply as I can into the mystery of the unreached. The Scripture and some wisdom gained from our forebears in the church has put us on the trail of the divine perseverance. But at the end this footnote must be added: divine mystery is the companion of divine perseverance. And to God be the glory.

Response to Fackre

RONALD H. NASH

I BEGIN AS BEFORE WITH A STRONG RECOMMENDATION THAT THE reader turn immediately to my long chapter titled "Restrictivism." That chapter contains important background information that should be read before this necessarily brief response to Fackre's chapter on postmortem salvation.

* * *

Gabriel Fackre's chapter begins by making two seemingly positive moves. First, he rejects inclusivism. Citing Romans 10:9-10, Fackre declares, "The evidence from Scripture that hearing, believing and confessing the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ is integral to personal salvation is overwhelming." This is an important first step. Second, Fackre talks a lot about the importance of interpreting the Bible correctly. These statements unfortunately promise more than Fackre's chapter actually delivers. As we will see, any hope one might have that Fackre's principles of biblical interpretation will lead him to a biblically grounded position on the destiny of the unevangelized fade rapidly.

His problems begin with a claim that seems to come out of nowhere: "The divine perseverance will not deny the saving Word to any, and

will contest all the makers of boundaries, including the final boundary, 'the last enemy, death.' " Fackre is certainly correct in warning against any human attempt to limit God by placing him within our human boundaries. The specific "human boundary" Fackre has in mind is physical death. It is we humans, Fackre insists, who have said that God's perseverance in dealing with unbelievers must end with the physical death of that person.

Suppose we concede that God may, if he chooses, continue to pursue unbelievers after their death. That is hardly the issue, I think. The important question concerns whether that is what God teaches us in his Word. If postmortem salvation is not endorsed in Scripture, we should not be tempted to treat human death as an artificial, human-made boundary upon God's power. The reader must not be foolish here and treat what is nothing more than an assumption as though it were a well-established conclusion.

It is surprising to see that while Fackre talks a lot about how unevangelized persons are fit candidates for divine salvation after death, he says nothing about the biblical texts that have traditionally been understood to teach that God in fact does view physical death as the end of any human opportunity for salvation. In spite of Fackre's exhortation to interpret Scripture reverently, carefully and contextually, he himself offers some of the most questionable readings of the Bible that I have seen outside of some well-known American cults. Consider the following.

First Peter 4:6

I was not surprised to see Fackre appeal to 1 Peter 3—4 for support for his doctrine of postmortem salvation. In my chapter I point out the dangers in any attempt to ground any key theological thinking on unclear and controversial texts. The principle of allowing clear passages to interpret ambiguous ones, of allowing doctrinal passages to interpret nondoctrinal ones, of allowing clearly literal passages to interpret material full of nonliteral language is well established.

In spite of this, Fackre appeals to 1 Peter 4:6 ("for this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead") as his major biblical support for postmortem salvation. In my chapter I argue for three points:

☐ there is absolutely no reason to think the "dead" mentioned in this verse are identical with "the spirits in prison" mentioned in 1 Peter 3

☐ "the dead" in 4:6 could more naturally refer to people who were spiritually dead at one time and became spiritually alive after hearing the gospel; this is precisely the analogy Paul presents in Ephesians 2:1-10

☐ alternatively, "the dead" may well be people who heard the gospel during their lifetime but who are now, in the manner of all flesh, deceased

No responsible reading of chapters 3—4 of 1 Peter can support a belief in salvation after death.

First Corinthians 15:19

Fackre paraphrases this verse as follows: "If in this life alone human beings have hope, then we are miserable indeed." According to Fackre, the apostle Paul believed that all human beings have hope for salvation beyond this life. But Fackre has done great violence to the text. If we ignore his paraphrase and read the text for ourselves, it tells us that "if only for this life *we* have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (NIV). The word *we* as well as the context makes it plain that Paul is offering this consolation for persecuted Christian believers. The hope for the future that Paul has in view is not postmortem salvation but the resurrection (vv. 17-18) and the unending glory that will follow.

John 10:16

Here Fackre finds Jesus saying, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." I urge the reader to check

this passage in as many evangelical commentaries as he or she likes. In none of them will we find "the other sheep" interpreted as unevangelized believers who have become Christians after death. The "other sheep" are Gentile Christians who will be united with Jewish Christians into one flock, the church of Jesus Christ.

John 5:25-29

Fackre's most creative piece of biblical exegesis involves John 5:25: "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Obviously, Fackre wants the reader to think this verse refers to the unevangelized who will hear the gospel for the first time after their death, believe it and thus become beneficiaries of eternal life. But there is no way verse 25 can be understood in this way when we examine the entire context.

A little theological background will be helpful. In Ephesians 2:1 Paul describes Christians as people who, prior to their conversion, were spiritually dead. But because of God's great love for us, God "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Eph 2:4 NIV). Taking our cue from this text, we must realize that in the New Testament there are two kinds of death, two kinds of life and two kinds of resurrection. The two kinds of death are physical death (the death of the human body) and spiritual death, Paul's concern in Ephesians 2. What Revelation 20:14 calls "the second death" (eternal separation from God) is actually the natural extension or outcome of spiritual death. Corresponding to these two kinds of death are two kinds of life: physical life (the kind of existence we have prior to physical death) and spiritual life (the new life God gives us after regeneration, as described in Eph 2). And corresponding to these previous two pairs, there is physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:52-54) and spiritual resurrection (Eph 2:4).

Throughout John 5:24-29, Jesus refers to these twin concepts of death, life and resurrection. Confirmation of this claim can be found

in any evangelical commentary. What then did Jesus mean in John 5:25 when he said, "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming [a reference to a future event], and is now here [the present], when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live"? The present fulfillment of Jesus' words is found in the growing multitude of the spiritually dead who hear and accept the message of the Son of God and pass from spiritual death to spiritual life (see Jn 5:24). The still future fulfillment is found in the coming bodily resurrection.

That this is so is clear from John 5:28-29, verses that Fackre conveniently ignores: "Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." Jesus is obviously referring to the general resurrection at the end of the world, when all human beings will hear his voice and come forth from the grave. Compare what happened at the grave of Lazarus when Jesus ordered him to come forth (Jn 11:43-44).

Perhaps the reason Fackre ignores John 5:29 is that it clearly teaches that what differentiates those who rise to eternal life from those who rise to condemnation is what those persons did during their earthly life. This passage confronts Fackre with a double whammy: not only does it not teach what he claims it does, but it also goes on to teach things that flatly contradict his myth of salvation after death.[1]

As irenic as I would like to be, I must also be candid. I find Fackre's misuse of Scripture to be irresponsible. After two thousand years of church history, the kind of creativity he demonstrates in his approach to Scripture is not exactly a Christian virtue.

A Concluding Observation

Fackre's theory of salvation after death lacks biblical support. For some reason he acts as though he has no obligation to deal with the passages of Scripture that contradict his theory. His doctrine, I

conclude, is a figment of his imagination. I fail to see how anyone can regard himself as an exemplar of compassion for the unevangelized by offering them and others a totally false hope about their future.

Response to Fackre

JOHN SANDERS

PROFESSOR FACKRE HAS WRITTEN AN INTERESTING AND HELPFUL essay. There is much in it to appreciate. To begin with, I like the way he seeks to draw some of the broad themes of Scripture together into a "pattern." Using the analogy of faith, he attempts to read the whole of Scripture to see where its trajectory lies. He then seeks to fit this trajectory together with other doctrines in order to frame an answer to the destiny of the unevangelized. Although he and I use a similar methodology, we weave the themes of Scripture together in different ways and so arrive at different conclusions. Let me elaborate some of our points of agreement and then some areas of difference.

The Wider Hope and the Problem of Evil

The most fundamental area where Fackre and I agree is what is called "the wider hope." This refers to God's making salvation available to those outside the boundaries of the earthly visible church. Fackre is correct that salvation is universally accessible because God decides it should be. Our views agree that God, in grace, grants every individual a genuine opportunity to participate in the salvation that Jesus secured. No human being is excluded from the possibility of benefiting from

salvific grace. The holy Trinity, in magnanimous love, searches far and wide to save sinners. We agree that it is sinners Jesus came to save, and that none of them are excluded from benefiting from the work of Jesus due to the failings and disobedience of Christians. Salvation is not restricted to those who hear about Christ from human missionaries.

We also agree in understanding the fate of the unevangelized as part of the larger problem of evil. Restrictivism calls into question the divine power and goodness. It seems that God is either not powerful enough or not good enough to save those he desires to save. In Nash's version of restrictivism, God has the power to save but simply does not desire that everyone be saved. Both the divine perseverance model and inclusivism see God as powerful enough *and* caring enough to bring the unevangelized an opportunity for salvation. Both see God as the Hound of Heaven who does not easily give up on recalcitrant sinners.

Fackre unpacks this idea with particular vigor and applies it to the idea that even after death, God perseveres in seeking the lost. It is interesting that a good many philosophers of religion wrestling with this aspect of the problem of evil are defending the divine perseverance model.[1] What they seem to find most helpful is the fact that this view makes God's distributive justice quite clear-cut without overriding human freedom.

The Question of Timing

Although I am quite appreciative of these points, I have a number of reservations concerning the divine perseverance view. Though I agree with Fackre that *if* God decides to evangelize people after death then God has the power and the right to do so, I do not believe God has so decided. Inclusivism does not seek to set limits as to when and how Christ can work. Rather, God has decided that he wants to see a faith response in this life. According to inclusivism, there will be a post-mortem encounter with Christ for those who exercised faith in God as he was made known to them. But this encounter will be to confirm

their faith and introduce them to the One who saved them, not to evangelize them. It will be like C. S. Lewis's story of Aslan and Emeth, cited in my chapter, where Emeth meets the Christ whom he has sought even though he was ignorant of his true nature. Emeth is confirmed in his faith, in the direction he was already headed, not converted to a new path. God sees the overall direction in which we are going in this life—either toward or away from God—and brings those moving toward God into blessed fellowship with the divine Son after death.

Fackre, however, believes that no one will be condemned until God sees what his or her response to Jesus is. Passages such as Matthew 10:32-33, Mark 16:15-16 and John 3:18, 36 might indicate this to be the case. I am not persuaded, though, that they do in fact teach that only those who have specifically rejected the person of Jesus will be condemned. Rather, I believe they are addressing Jesus' contemporaries, some of whom brought judgment on themselves by their rejection of Jesus. If Fackre could make the case that these verses teach that the only reason anyone will be consigned to eternal damnation is for rejecting Christ, he would have an incredibly strong argument for the divine perseverance model.

In their essays Fackre and Nash refer to Romans 10:9-10 for the necessity of confessing Jesus in order to be saved. I do not believe these verses teach the *necessity* of confessing Jesus but rather that if you do you are indeed one of the saved. As I argue against restrictivism, the categories of those who confess Jesus and those who are saved are not identical, since some in the Old Testament and the believing unevangelized are saved without confessing Jesus.

Paul addressed this earlier in chapter 4 of his letter to the Romans. There he writes that Abraham was saved by faith—faith that he and Sarah would have a son in their old age. He also says that David was saved by faith. What David believed and what Abraham believed (the content of their faith) were not identical. Nevertheless, they trusted in the same God. By extension, if the unevangelized trust in this God,

they also will be saved even though they are ignorant (as was Abraham) of Jesus the Savior. When we exercise faith in God to the extent of our knowledge, then the God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead will save us also (Rom 4:24).[2]

The Work of Revelation

One reason Fackre takes the route he does is that he does not believe people can find God (at least the God of salvation) through general revelation. He sees the creational revelation as *background* for the redemptive action of special revelation. Hence he distinguishes God's horizontal and temporal work through general revelation from God's vertical work of eternal salvation in special revelation. Fackre cites part of Acts 17:27, which says that through general revelation people may "search for God and perhaps grope for him." This does not sound very promising. But in the rest of the verse Paul declares to the Athenians that God wants them to search for him and *find him,* since God is not far from any one of us!

Paul believes we can find God through general revelation. This is good news, since the God of general revelation is the same God who redeems humanity through Jesus' atonement. Once the unevangelized are in touch with God, they are in touch with the God who saves. The God of all revelation uses any means at his disposal to bring people into a faith relationship with himself.

For me there is simply more continuity between the two types of revelation than there is for Fackre. Although the two kinds of revelation are distinct, they are from the same Father of our Lord Jesus, who draws all people to himself, even through general revelation.

Jesus' Descent into Hell

Regarding 1 Peter 3:19—4:6, I am intrigued by Fackre's arguments but not persuaded that the text teaches postmortem evangelization. It is an obscure text whose precise meaning has been debated for nearly two millennia now. I do not believe the descent of Christ into hell was

for evangelistic purposes but for the release of those who died with a faith commitment to God. Let me acknowledge, however, that I, like everyone else, lack an airtight argument for my interpretation of this passage.

In conclusion, though I am appreciative of Fackre's attempt to solve the soteriological problem of evil, I do not believe his model is as plausible as inclusivism. Given the pattern I see in Scripture of how God works with us by faith in the here and now, inclusivism seems the more attractive of the wider hope views.

Restrictivism

RONALD H. NASH

EVANGELICALS BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY SAVIOR. THERE IS NO other savior and no other religion, we believe, that can bring human beings to the saving grace of God.[1] It is also safe to say that most evangelical Christians regard the truth contained in the following verses as an essential part of their belief-system:

> Jesus answered, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6)
>
> There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)
>
> If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Rom 10:9-10)
>
> Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Jn 3:17-18)

> And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9:27-28)

I know no one who denies that evangelicals commonly understand verses like these to teach that since the death and resurrection of Jesus, explicit personal faith in Jesus is a necessary condition for salvation. Typically evangelicals also believe that physical death marks the end of any human opportunity to receive the gift of God's salvation.

John Sanders and Gabriel Fackre represent what appears to be a growing number of people within evangelicalism who dispute this understanding of the Christian gospel. Fackre, for example, wants all of us to think that physical death is not the end of a human being's opportunity for salvation. This is a remarkable shift that he is asking us to make. Sanders wants us to believe that we have badly misunderstood the verses quoted above and that these Scriptures do not teach what we all have taken them to mean. What all or most of us have regarded as bedrock on many issues is simply wrong, or so Sanders thinks. Surely the seriousness of the claims advanced by Fackre and Sanders will result in their assuming the burden of proof for their positions.

Now I am not suggesting that large numbers of Christians cannot be wrong about some commonly accepted interpretation of Scripture. As a matter of fact, I think this is the case with regard to some widely held views in the twentieth century.[2] But such beliefs seldom touch any matter so central to the Christian faith as the scope of salvation. It is one thing to disagree over eschatology or lordship salvation; it is quite another to discover that we have simply been mistaken about the meaning of such essential passages as Romans 10:9-10, Acts 4:12 and John 14:6. Both Sanders and Fackre are asking Christians today to reshuffle the deck and commit themselves to a totally new understanding of how God saves the lost. As the reader will eventually discover, both will dispute this last claim and attempt to make a case for their disparate understanding of these matters. If their effort proves successful, that is something that

restrictivists like me will have to deal with.

Several features of my presentation may puzzle some readers. Some may think that the content and organization of this chapter fails adequately to present a case for restrictivism. That is, they may wonder why I do not spend more of my space laying out a detailed, constructive case for restrictivism. A proper answer to this misunderstanding involves an analogy between my overall argument for restrictivism and the kinds of argument Christians offer in support of such doctrines or theological positions as creation ex nihilo, the Trinity and Calvinism. The set of reasons that Christians believe in the Trinity usually begins with a number of well-known passages of Scripture, such as Matthew 28:19-20. But our trinitarianism is also inseparable from the total unacceptability of the other options that are out there. Historically, once Christians rejected unitarianism, modalism[3] and the host of other alternatives that they found incompatible with Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity began to take shape. A similar situation exists with respect to this debate.

In the final analysis, whatever position we accept must do justice to the teaching of Scripture. My analysis of my colleagues' positions will, of course, look seriously at what they allege is the biblical support for their views. But I will also engage in a detailed investigation of how they operate with regard to a number of important theological issues. I believe we will discover that they run into major problems when they try to support their theories from Scripture. Indeed, we will see the frequently odd ways they are forced to treat Scripture in order to disqualify what evangelicals have commonly regarded as the meaning of the key biblical texts dealing with the issue of human salvation. We will also note the strange twists and turns in the theology that functions as the framework for their positions. I point out all this so the reader will understand that a case for restrictivism cannot be divorced from my criticisms of the two competing positions represented by my coauthors. I am a restrictivist both because I am convinced it is the view taught in Scripture and because the competing

views contain serious flaws, both biblical and theological.[4]

Inclusivism and General Revelation

One of inclusivism's key assumptions is the belief that general revelation is sufficient to bring people to salvation.[5] Inclusivists are required to say this. After all, they insist that salvation is accessible to all humans, including the millions who lack any contact with special revelation. Because special revelation is not necessary for salvation in such cases, inclusivists are forced to find a salvific role in a general revelation that all human beings can apprehend. As Clark Pinnock states, "The knowledge of God is not limited to places where biblical revelation has penetrated."[6] According to John Sanders, inclusivists "believe that appropriation of salvific grace is mediated through general revelation and God's providential workings in human history."[7]

Sanders insists that the word *gospel* has a wider meaning than simply the good news about Jesus. The gospel must also include light that is available to the unevangelized through general revelation. One obvious problem with such a claim is its apparent conflict with 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, where Paul unfolds the meaning of the gospel in terms of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Sanders's answer to this difficulty amounts, in my opinion, to a serious dilution of Paul's meaning. Sanders claims that "Paul does not say one has to know these facts [about Christ's death and resurrection] to be saved, only that he had proclaimed this message to the Corinthians."[8]

To protect their particular view of general revelation and hence their view of salvation, inclusivists have to relativize the content of Paul's gospel to different people, places and times. This should give evangelicals reason to think twice before embracing inclusivism. Are the death and resurrection of Jesus essential to the gospel, or is the gospel instead an assortment of odds and ends that can assume many different forms?

Inclusivism and Romans 1—3

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by explaining that one reason all

humans are condemned is that they have resisted the message of general revelation. Romans 1:18-19 states, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them." Even though God has made important information available to all humans through general revelation, Paul teaches, this revelation has failed to bring about salvation (see Rom 3:10, 23).

Romans 1—3 seems clearly to contradict the inclusivist's belief that people in non-Christian religions may be saved by responding in faith to the content of general revelation.[9] Paul makes it plain that general revelation does not and cannot save. Bruce Demarest summarizes what is generally taken to be Paul's teaching:

> We have seen that through universal general revelation God has disclosed to people His existence, perfections, and moral demands. But we have also seen that sinful man consistently repudiates this elemental knowledge of God and perverts it into unspeakable idolatry. Thus, in practice, general revelation serves only to condemn man, not to save him. However, the God of grace and mercy did not abandon the sinner in his state of self-willed rebellion. God has broken into man's sin-darkened existence with a special supernatural revelation that holds out the offer of spiritual healing. By this fresh revelatory initiative, God offers Himself to man not only as a power to be encountered but as a Person to be known in a fellowship of trust and commitment.[10]

Paul's teaching that no human being succeeds in living up to the light of general revelation implies that general revelation cannot save; special revelation is required for that result.[11] Nowhere in Romans 1—3 does Paul give general revelation enhanced status as an instrument of salvation.

General Revelation in Other Texts

Inclusivists need some clear, strong support from Scripture to ground

their belief in the salvific function of general revelation. Since serious spatial limitations prevent me from examining the full run of the texts they cite, I must confine this discussion to one that John Sanders has appealed to.

Sanders finds support for the salvific function of general revelation in Romans 10:18:

> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for
>
> "Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
>
> and their words to the ends of the world."

The key part of this verse for inclusivists is Paul's quotation from Psalm 19:4. Admittedly, these words are a poetical allusion to the power of general revelation. Who can forget the first verse of that psalm and its message that "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"?

Yet inclusivists overreach when they call Paul's use of Psalm 19:4 an endorsement of a salvific role for general revelation. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce explains, "It is unnecessary to suppose that Paul regarded Psalm xix.4 as a *prediction* of the world-wide dissemination of the gospel; he means that the dissemination of the gospel is becoming as world-wide as the light of the heavenly bodies."[12] If Sanders's view of Romans 10:18 were accepted, it would bring Paul's argument in that chapter to an abrupt halt. Even the most superficial reading of the context makes it clear that Paul is talking about the indispensability of special revelation for salvation and the urgency for human evangelists to carry the gospel to the world. Romans 10 exalts special, not general, revelation.

Where, we are required to ask, is the clear, unambiguous biblical support inclusivists need for their belief in the salvific function of general revelation?[13] The simple answer is that there is none. The inclusivist's view of general revelation is assumed without biblical warrant and is then used to compromise other important biblical teachings such as Paul's identification of Christ's death and resurrection as an essential component of the gospel. So although inclusivists

want very much to believe that general revelation can bring humans to salvation, they fail to show that Scripture teaches this view and fail to recognize a conflict with Paul's teaching in Romans 1—3.

The Distinction Between Christians and Believers

I turn now to another set of issues, all related to the fact that inclusivists are compelled by the logic of their position to make a distinction between Christians and believers. John Sanders defines believers as "all those who are saved because they have faith in God."[14] A Christian, by contrast, is "a believer who knows about and participates in the work of Jesus Christ."[15] This means that in heaven we will encounter both Christian and non-Christian believers who, when all is said and done, got to heaven by different routes. This view is inherent in inclusivism.

This claim is supposedly supported by three theories, all of which occupy a central place in inclusivist thinking: (1) a distinctively inclusivist understanding of the nature of faith; (2) a claim that Old Testament believers constitute a precedent for God's acceptance of non-Christian believers today; and (3) an appeal to an alleged Old Testament tradition of "holy pagans." I will examine each of these positions and then return to the question whether a distinction between believers and Christians can ground inclusivist convictions.

1. The inclusivist understanding of faith. While inclusivists believe that an act of faith is necessary for salvation, they insist that this faith need not have Jesus as its direct object.[16] Inclusivists think the salvation of unevangelized people depends on how they respond to the light they have. In ways that inclusivists find difficult to explain, the light of general revelation brings many of the unevangelized to a trust in the true God—a trust that has nothing to do with Jesus Christ, of whom they are uninformed.

According to Clark Pinnock, people are saved by what he calls "the faith principle." That is, the saved must satisfy the conditions of Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for

whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." It is faith or trust that saves, not knowledge.

But does Hebrews 11:6 exhaust the content of faith? Obviously one precondition for saving faith, our text tells us, is believing that God exists. Just as certainly, believers are expected to "seek" God, although other passages in the Bible will have to give this "seeking" the proper content. This much we can learn from Hebrews 11:6.

But few evangelicals think that Hebrews 11:6 exhausts the biblical meaning of saving faith. For one thing, this faith in the existence of God must be directed to the true God, not some idol or pagan substitute. Moreover, the New Testament clearly states that humans who would seek God must approach him through the one and only mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). The "faith principle" that Pinnock formulates from Hebrews 11:6 is incomplete. Pinnock's principle distorts and dilutes the New Testament's picture of saving faith.

Pinnock says, "According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology."[17] This is a claim inclusivists must make. But if God saves people solely on the basis of "faith," irrespective of their access to special revelation, the gospel and Jesus Christ, then an inclusivist's view of saving faith will be radically different from the traditional evangelical view. It is also, I am persuaded, different from the biblical view of saving faith. While we might not all agree on the precise amount of knowledge that is required for saving faith to exist, the information that Scripture provides far exceeds the scanty requirements of the inclusivists.[18] Most Christians find the needed information in New Testament texts like John 14:6, Acts 4:12 and Romans 10:9-10. But inclusivists are prevented from agreeing with this because the meaning evangelicals customarily find in these passages conflicts logically with the requirements of the inclusivist position. We will shortly see how much effort inclusivists expend in dismantling the usual evangelical thinking about these texts.

Unfortunately, the inclusivists' view of faith is deficient in theo-

logical content. Whether a faith that nebulous and lacking in content can actually save is one of the issues at stake in the debate between inclusivists and restrictivists. The picture is clear: inclusivists hold that faith can save people even when it is deficient in theological (that is, biblical) content, yet no scriptural text asserts this. Indeed, Scripture teaches the precise opposite.

While I agree that people are not saved simply by assenting to a smattering of discrete pieces of information, I nonetheless maintain that saving faith has an awareness of some information as one of its necessary conditions (Rom 10:9-10). It is reckless, dangerous and unbiblical to lead people to think that the preaching of the gospel (which Paul insists contains specifics about the person and work of Christ) and personal faith in Jesus are not necessary for salvation. Anyone who recognizes these problems with the so-called faith principle cannot consistently accept the rest of the inclusivist system.

2. Inclusivism and Old Testament believers. The second plank in the inclusivist system is the distinction between Christians and believers. As Pinnock frames the issue, "A person who is informationally premessianic, whether living in ancient or modern times, is in exactly the same spiritual situation."[19]

The inclusivist view on this issue depends on the claim that Old Testament Jewish believers are in precisely the same spiritual condition as present-day non-Christians who nonetheless "believe in God." But surely there are significant differences that break down any supposed analogy. For one thing, there is the biblical teaching that Old and New Testament believers share a covenantal relationship to God that is grounded on special revelation. The New Testament refers repeatedly to the continuity between Old and New Testament saints (Rom 1:1-2; 11:11-24; Gal 3:7-9, 29; 6:16; Phil 3:3; Heb 11). The Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the one, final sacrifice offered up by Jesus Christ (Heb 9—10). The New Testament reports that the Old Testament saints looked forward to a mediator who would die (Jn 5:46; 8:56; 1 Pet 1:10-12) and says that the gospel was preached

to Abraham (Gal 3:6). While there may be much about these references that we do not fully understand, we cannot ignore what we do see in these passages in order to support a faulty analogy between Old Testament saints and unevangelized twentieth-century believers.

How can Old Testament believers who had a significant relationship to special revelation, and whose faith was tied to symbols and practices that looked forward to Christ, provide warrant for treating unevangelized moderns as saved believers? The answer, of course, is that they cannot.

3. "Holy pagans." Inclusivists argue that there is an Old Testament tradition of "holy pagans," or believing Gentiles who lived outside God's covenant with Israel. They included Melchizedek, Job, Jethro, Naaman and, in the New Testament, the Roman centurion Cornelius.

The person in this list who receives the most attention is Melchizedek, whom Pinnock describes as a "pagan" priest who blessed Abram (Gen 14:19) and whom the New Testament treats as a symbol of Christ's high-priestly work (Heb 7). According to Pinnock, Abram's meeting with Melchizedek in Genesis 14 "makes the point that religious experience may be valid outside Judaism and Christianity."[20] But something is surely wrong in the inclusivist's handling of the Melchizedek material. Because Genesis identifies Melchizedek as a priest of the Most High God, he can hardly be treated as an example of genuine piety among pagans. Melchizedek worshiped and served Yahweh as certainly as Abram did.

Nor are references to Naaman any more successful. While Naaman had been a pagan, he came to confess faith in Yahweh (2 Kings 5:15). Sanders points out that Naaman then requested forgiveness for the times he would enter the temple of the pagan god Rimmon after his return to Syria. Sanders takes this to mean that Naaman continued to have some unorthodox beliefs mixed with his "belief in God."[21] As we know, it usually takes new believers time to absorb truth about God and to wean out old habits. Furthermore, Sanders seems to forget that since Naaman was an important figure in his society, he was occasion-

ally required to participate in civil ceremonies in the temple of Rimmon. Whatever the case, nothing in the text suggests that Naaman continued to believe in the pagan deity.

The magi who sought out the young child Jesus may well have been pagan astrologers, although we should not ignore the possibility that they were displaced Jews of the Diaspora. In any case, they did come seeking Jesus. The example proves nothing.

There is reason to doubt that some in the inclusivists' list of holy pagans (such as Abimelech and Balaam) were saved. Few of the people cited impress me as examples of redeemed believers.

One final line of argument must be noted in this connection. Inclusivists often quote Old Testament texts that mention God's desire to save Gentiles. Such passages are irrelevant to the matter at hand. None of them suggests that these Gentiles could come to experience God's salvation in any way apart from the means provided by God in special revelation.

In summary, such an examination of inclusivist attempts to marshal support for their distinction between Christians and saved, non-Christian believers reveals an assortment of disappointing moves. For one thing, they appeal to a type of faith that is deficient in cognitive content and devoid of any necessary reference to Christ. This kind of faith lacks contact with biblical faith and leads to severely antibiblical consequences.

The attempt to link Old Testament believers and possible believers in non-Christian religions collapses because of its inattention to the crucial differences between the two groups. Similarly, attempts to find holy pagans in the Old Testament and then link them to holy pagans in contemporary non-Christian religions fail because the Old Testament examples either were not holy or were no longer pagans. Gentile worshipers of Yahweh in the Old Testament prove by and large to be rather poor role models for the inclusivists' non-Christian believers in the contemporary world.

Of course, we can always engage in long debates about the faith of

genuine believers (Jewish and Gentile) during the centuries before Christ. But fishing in these waters hardly yields the results that inclusivists need to support their theory. When the weaknesses of their appeal to general revelation as a medium of salvation are taken into account, the theological case for their position looks even less impressive.

The Problem of Infant Salvation

Constraints on the length of this chapter permit me to consider only one additional theological justification offered in support of inclusivism. Because of the powerful emotional appeal this final claim has for many people, it often functions as inclusivism's most persuasive argument.

Inclusivists note that almost all Christian restrictivists allow that children who die in infancy (as well as people who are mentally incompetent) are included within the circle of God's saving grace. Inclusivists charge that this belief creates a kind of slippery slope for restrictivists. If babies who die in infancy and mental incompetents will be in heaven without ever coming to explicit faith in Christ, then, to be consistent, should we not grant the same privilege to "innocent" people outside the bounds of Christianity who also die without ever hearing the gospel?[22] If God's salvific will encompasses babies and the mentally incompetent who die unevangelized, why should God's salvation not also include all those who have never heard of Christ?

The question we must ask in evaluating this argument is whether it ignores important differences between infants and mental incompetents on the one hand and, on the other hand, unevangelized people who are mature enough to be held accountable for their resistance to the light of general revelation and who thus are morally accountable for their specific acts of sin.

It is difficult to find competent discussions of infant salvation. To my mind, the most persuasive short treatment of the subject has come recently from the pen of my colleague at Reformed Theological

Seminary, Roger Nicole. Because of its importance to this discussion, I quote it in full.

> The question is: "Is it compatible with Scripture and the Reformed Confessions to think that infants dying in infancy may be saved? And if so, is that true of some infants only or of all infants dying in infancy?"
>
> The Westminster Confession's clear answer to the question states: "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth" (10. 3).
>
> This statement obviously recognizes that at least some infants dying in infancy will be saved. It does not preclude the view that all infants dying in infancy are elect and therefore will be saved. This was the position of B. B. Warfield (*Two Studies in the History of Doctrine,* 1897) and of R. A. Webb (*The Theology of Infant Salvation,* 1907).
>
> It must be recognized that all humans, including infants, are under the curse of Adam's sin and so God does not owe any one salvation. Yet, when we examine the picture of judgment in Scripture, we find that condemnation is in fact meted out in terms of sins committed while in the body (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. also Mt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6, 8); of careless words spoken (Mt. 12:36, 37); of recorded deeds (Rev. 20:12, 13; Jer. 17:10). Especially relevant in this connection is the entire chapter of Ezekiel 18.
>
> Those who die in infancy have no personal guilt of that type since they die before the age of accountability. One could say therefore that they share in the guilt of Adam since they die (Rom. 5:14) but it is not apparent that they will ultimately be condemned since they did not commit any of the personal sins that constitute the basis of the condemnation meted out at the last judgment to the non-elect.
>
> One could, therefore, infer that infants dying in infancy are incorporated without an act of their will in the condemnation of Adam and similarly are ingrafted without an act of personal faith

> into the saving benefits of the work of Christ. The Bible does not discuss this at length because there is no way in which these can be reached by preaching and they do not fall under the logic of Rom. 10:13-15. These infants need to be regenerated, of course, and it is not stipulated when: any time between the mother's womb and the time of their death would appear possible. This outlook would enormously increase one's understanding of the scope of election.[23]

These significant differences between children who die in infancy (and by implication, mental incompetents as well) and morally responsible unevangelized persons whom God holds accountable for their deeds are ignored by those who would seek to use the salvation of the first group as a pretext for the salvation of the second.

Inclusivism and the Bible

It is now time to examine inclusivism's relationship to the Bible. I begin with an analysis of the most important texts that inclusivists appeal to in support of their position.

Acts 10 and the case of Cornelius. No Scripture passage is mentioned more often by inclusivists than the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. The context is the period immediately after Pentecost—a hectic time for the early church (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Events were happening fast and furiously, and the threat of persecution was always present (Acts 8:1). It was also a time of some confusion, especially with regard to the relationship between features of the old Judaism and the life of the young church (Acts 11:1-3). Was the salvation Christ offered only for Jews? If it was also for Gentiles, was it necessary for those Gentiles to conform to such Jewish rituals as circumcision (Acts 15:1-2)? These questions were compounded because Jewish culture forbade good Jews to eat and fellowship in Gentile homes (Gal 2:11-14).

Cornelius was a Roman centurion living in Caesarea. As Acts 10:2 reports, Cornelius "was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God." Several elements of this account are worth noting.

Luke certainly seems to be telling us that Cornelius, though a Gentile, was a faithful believer in Yahweh. Morally and spiritually he was in precisely the same condition as any faithful and believing Jew of that time who had not yet encountered Jesus. We could go so far as to say that his relationship to Yahweh was similar to that of an Old Testament believer.

The whole first-century community of believers in Yahweh was a kind of transitional generation. Jesus had instituted a new covenant. Hence, it was important for faithful Jews to hear about Jesus as the promised Messiah whose mission, as prophesied in the Old Testament, was to die for human sin and rise again. This is why we find Paul working zealously to bring the message of Christ to his Jewish brothers and sisters. And it was important for Gentile believers in Yahweh to hear the same message.

Acts 10 tells how God used Peter to bring Cornelius that message, but the chapter adds an additional piece to the puzzle. Peter was not sure he was acting properly in going to Cornelius. It is clear that he was prejudiced when it came to Gentiles, despite the Great Commission (Mt 28:19; Acts 1:8). Hence both Cornelius and Peter had important things to learn. After Peter shared the gospel with Cornelius, the centurion and everyone in his house believed and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

On the surface it appears that nothing in this biblical account supports the inclusivist claim that God saves many unevangelized persons without any specific reference to Jesus Christ. How did this chapter become so important to the inclusivists' case?

For inclusivists, the key passage in the chapter is verses 34 and 35: "Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.' " Inclusivists cite these words to show that knowledge of Christ is not necessary for salvation.[24] The entire story is supposed to support the inclusivist distinction between believers and Christians.

On the basis of verses 34-35, inclusivists say that any person who simply fears a supreme being and lives a good life will be accepted by God. I disagree. Earlier in this chapter I took issue with inclusivists who take the two points in Hebrews 11:6 (believing that God exists and seeking God) as exhausting the content of saving faith. Their treatment of Acts 10:35 falls to the same error. Unless we challenge this approach, we will be left with the view that one can approach the Father without the Son—a claim clearly contradicted by 1 John 2:23 and John 14:6. Moreover, the suggestion that living a good life can satisfy God smacks of the heresy known as Pelagianism and again contradicts a major New Testament emphasis. While fearing God and doing what is right are important elements of the Christian commitment, they do not exhaust what it means to be a saved believer. Peter's words in Acts 10:35 complement the oft-cited New Testament emphasis on the centrality of Christ in the salvation process. But to use Peter's words to supplant that central point begs the inclusivist question.

None of the inclusivist claims for this chapter stand up when we view Acts 10 in the proper light.[25] Cornelius was a believer in the same sense as every believing Jew prior to Christ. Two conditions prevailed during those transitional years: (1) believing Jews and Gentiles (like Cornelius) needed to know that the Son of God had come into the world and offered his life as a sacrifice for many; and (2) Christian Jews (like Peter) had to learn how to deal with the brewing controversy over Gentiles in the early church.

Pinnock describes Cornelius as "the pagan saint par excellence of the New Testament, a believer in God before he became a Christian."[26] This statement seems to be a desperate attempt to buttress the inclusivist position. Was this Gentile who feared Yahweh and who knew and believed the special revelation God delivered in the Old Testament really a "*pagan* saint"?

Acts 17:28-30. In Paul's memorable message to Athenian intellectuals, he quotes from a pagan Stoic philosopher: "For 'In him we live

and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring' " (v. 28).

Pinnock regards Paul's actions as an endorsement of pagan religious sentiments,[27] and Alan Race claims that Paul's message "acknowledges the authenticity of the worship of the men of Athens at their altar 'to an unknown God.' "[28] Race's claim, however, is falsified first by the conclusion to Paul's sermon: "[God] has fixed a day when he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (v. 31). It is falsified in the second place in that Paul's words led some in the audience to turn from their false gods to the truth (v. 34).

Pinnock and Race seem to forget that Paul was an educated man addressing an audience of educated people. What better way to gain their attention than to show that he was acquainted with some of their writers and could quote them? One quote hardly proves that Paul had any interest in or sympathy with Stoic thought.[29]

Pinnock has more to say on this text. In verse 30 Paul states, "While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent." For Pinnock, these words teach that God overlooks the sins of all who fail to trust in Jesus because of ignorance. New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce has a better grasp of Paul's meaning: however patient God may have been prior to the coming of Christ, Paul is saying that the time of patience has ended. Bruce states: "If ignorance of the divine nature was culpable before [Christ's coming], it is inexcusable now. Let all people everywhere (the Athenians included) repent therefore of their false conception of God (and consequent flouting of his will) and embrace the true knowledge of his being now made available in the gospel."[30]

It is difficult to see how passages that clearly call on lost pagans to place their faith in Christ can be treated as proof-texts for the inclusivist position that saving faith can exist apart from Christ.[31]

The "Universal Accessibility of Salvation"

Inclusivists quote a number of Scripture texts that supposedly support their belief that God is obliged to make his salvation accessible to every person throughout world history. Such texts include the following:

> God our Savior . . . desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:3-4)
>
> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn 2:2)
>
> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. (Tit 2:11)

The feature common to these and other texts that supposedly support the universal accessibility of salvation is the use of words such as *all* and *world,* which inclusivists insist must always mean every human person. But it is not at all clear that these texts teach what inclusivists claim they teach. Consider Titus 2:11, quoted above. How can the expression *all* really refer to every single human being who has ever lived or will live?

Many theologians point out that expressions like *all* may refer either to *all humans without distinction* or to *all persons without exception.* In their view, texts such as Titus 2:11 do not describe what God has done or is doing for all humans without exception—that is, for every single human being; rather, they report what God did for all human beings without distinction. That is, Christ did not die just for Jews or for males or for educated people or for powerful individuals. He also died for Gentiles, for women and children, for barbarians, for slaves and the poor. He died for Jews, yes; but he also died for Romans, Thracians, Syrians, Ethiopians, Macedonians and Samaritans. All these passages—Titus 2:11, 1 Timothy 2:3-4 and 1 John 2:2—tell us what God has done for all human beings without distinction.[32]

To speak frankly, the biblical passages that inclusivists appeal to fail to do the job of supporting their position. When this recognition is coupled with the theological weaknesses of inclusivism that I noted

earlier, one must wonder why more supporters of inclusivism are not actively engaged in a reexamination of their position.

Restrictivism and the Scriptures

Restrictivism certainly appears to be on much firmer ground biblically than inclusivism. In addition to the host of well-known Bible texts that teach the precise opposite of inclusivism, the entire thrust of New Testament evangelism and missions runs counter to inclusivist assumptions. To close out this part of my discussion, I will cite a number of these restrictivist passages and then consider the inclusivist response.

> If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Rom 10:9-10)

Regarding this text, Sanders states, "It is clear from Romans 10:9 that whoever confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead will be saved. It is not clear that whoever does not fulfill these conditions is lost. Paul simply does not specify how much a person has to know to be saved."[33]

Sanders treats this passage as a conditional statement comparable to "If it rains, then the sidewalk will get wet." That is, if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him, you will be saved. Both conditional statements are true, Sanders assures us. But turning the nonbiblical sentence about the wet sidewalk around does not yield a true proposition. The sidewalk could be wet even though it has not rained. The sidewalk might have gotten wet some other way—from a sprinkling system, for example.

Similarly, Sanders insists, we are not entitled to turn around the conditional statement in Romans 10:9-10. In Sanders's words, "It is sometimes argued that since all those who accept Christ are saved, it must follow that only those who know about and accept Christ are saved. But this is like arguing that since all Collies are dogs, all dogs must be Collies."[34]

Sanders's logic is sound in the case of the relationships rain-wet sidewalk and collies-dogs: the conditional reasoning in these cases works in one direction but fails when reversed. Is Sanders correct, then, when he states that "All who receive Christ will be saved" is not synonymous with "All who do not receive Christ will be lost?"[35] If Sanders is correct, the traditional restrictivist meaning thought to be contained in Romans 10:9-10 turns out to contain an embarrassing logical blunder.

Sanders is correct in pointing out that propositions of the form "If *A* then *B*" do not convert simply to "If *B* then *A*." Likewise, propositions of the form "All *A* is *B*" do not convert to "All *B* is *A*." But there is one exception to this general rule. "All *A* is *B*" does convert to "All *B* is *A*" whenever *A* and *B* are identical. If the class of all people who have saving faith in Jesus Christ (call this *A*) is identical with the class of all saved believers (call this *B*), then every member of *A* is also a member of *B* and vice versa. In such a case one is entitled to say both that "All *A* is *B*" and that "All *B* is *A*." The same situation affects hypothetical statements like "If *A* then *B*."

This detour into logic reveals that the inclusivist argument cannot be used to disqualify Romans 10:9-10, because that would beg the very question we are attempting to settle. What Sanders does is simply assume that the two classes of people are different (which is tantamount to assuming his inclusivism) and then use that assumption to alter the meaning of the text. Unfortunately, he does not allow at all that the restrictivist interpretation of Romans 10:9-10 is even a possible reading of the text.

Acts 4:12. At first glance the meaning of this text seems clear: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." But according to Pinnock, Acts 4:12 does not speak in any way to the "fate of unevangelized people, whether they lived before or after Christ." Pinnock states further that "the text speaks forcefully about the incomparable power of Jesus' name to save (and heal) those who hear

and respond to the good news, but it does not comment on the fate of the heathen." For Pinnock, this verse "does not render a judgment, positive or negative, on another question that interests us a great deal: the status of other religions and the role they play in God's providence or plan of redemption."[36]

But it is hard to see why Pinnock's claim does not contradict the verse's unequivocal statement that "there is salvation [and healing] in no one else." Pinnock does here essentially what Sanders does with Romans 10:9-10. While Jesus is doing something unique and wonderful for the world, Pinnock denies that this is necessarily God's exclusive way.[37]

True, the broader context of Acts 4 emphasizes a holistic salvation that includes both physical and spiritual healing. But it would be wrong to ignore the relation of verse 12 to the even wider context of the rest of the book of Acts. As I will show later, a careful examination of Acts reveals the unwavering way in which Paul and other evangelists act and speak as though there is no other way.

John 14:6. In this familiar passage Jesus declares: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It would be hard to think of a more restrictivist declaration than Jesus' second sentence. In spite of this, Sanders believes that the verse says nothing about the unevangelized. While, in Sanders's view, the verse states that all who believe in Christ will be saved, it does not mean to say that all who fail to believe in him will be lost.[38]

Yet the words "no one comes to the Father except through me" are hardly compatible with inclusivist sentiments. If Sanders's spin on Jesus' words is correct, Jesus' skill as a communicator must certainly be questioned. In fact, this same question can be asked about such inspired New Testament writers as Peter and Paul, who certainly would have phrased their thoughts more carefully had they all been fully conscious of the nonrestrictivist position that evangelical inclusivists are required to attribute to them.

Other texts. There are several other restrictivist texts that speak for themselves:

> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 Jn 5:12)
>
> To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. (Jn 1:12)
>
> Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (Jn 20:30-31)
>
> No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 Jn 2:23)
>
> Those who believe in him [Jesus] are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Jn 3:18)

Between words like these and the opinions of inclusivists stands a world of difference. The inclusivist support from Scripture stands on shaky ground and reflects a disturbing tendency to explain away clear biblical statements that run contrary to their position.

Postmortem Salvation and 1 Peter 3—4

The most important question we can ask about postmortem evangelism (PME; called "divine perseverance" by Gabriel Fackre elsewhere in this book) is, What does Scripture teach about the subject of salvation or evangelism after death? Advocates of PME support their position with appeals to five major texts: 1 Peter 3:18—4:6, Acts 17:31, 2 Timothy 4:8, 1 John 4:17 and John 5:25-29. Unfortunately, the citation of these five texts is seldom backed up with any serious exegesis. I encourage my readers to study the last four passages mentioned above. I believe they will find that the texts really have nothing to say about the subject before us.

But the long passage in 1 Peter is quite a different matter, even though once again PME advocates often appear to run through the passage quickly, without any serious attempt to wrestle with the text. First Peter 3:18-21 states the following:

> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the verses that follow this passage, Peter talks about how Christians reject the wicked lifestyle of the unsaved. Because of this rejection, Christians suffer abuse from the unsaved, who one day will stand before the Judge of the living and the dead. Then Peter writes: "This is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does" (4:6).

It is customary for advocates of PME to link 1 Peter 4:6 with the reference to Noah's ark and "the spirits in prison." They view the latter as an allusion to Christ's descent into hell (a concept over which evangelicals disagree). But such a tactic is very weak exegetically; it fails to recognize that 1 Peter 4:1-5 slips totally alien subject matter into the middle of what PME supporters treat as one unbroken line of thought. I believe the PME advocates' exegesis is faulty, because we are left to ask what these five verses are doing in the middle of a discussion on a different subject. Those five verses make it extremely unlikely that 1 Peter 4:6 and its reference to preaching to those now dead are somehow connected with the immediately preceding passage, 3:18-21.

First Peter 4:6 may well be a reference to the common biblical practice of describing Christians as people who are now "dead" to—that is, oblivious to—certain things in their past. In Galatians 2:19-20 Paul describes himself as "crucified with Christ"; therefore,

he says, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." In Romans 6:2 Paul states that Christians have died to sin. Peter may well be saying something similar in 1 Peter 4:6. Of course it is also possible that Peter is only telling us, at this early stage in the life of the church, that many to whom the gospel came have since died physically, even though they are still alive and conscious in the spirit.

My point is that the PME reading of 1 Peter 4:6 is neither the only nor even the most plausible interpretation. Wise Christians do not base any important doctrine—especially one that is controversial and that might also contain heretical implications—on one single, highly debatable passage of Scripture. If this approach were applied by PME advocates to 1 Corinthians 15:29, it would lead Christians to follow a policy of baptizing living people as proxies for the unbaptized dead. It is clear, then, that there are many reasons not to think that 1 Peter 4:6 teaches that humans will have an opportunity to hear the gospel after death.

What about 1 Peter 3:19-20, which states that through the Spirit, Christ "also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah"? What does this mean? This verse is often injected into the debate because PME advocates understand it to say that between Jesus' death and resurrection he descended into the lower world and evangelized some group of people who were already dead. The reason this view does not work is that verse 20 appears to describe the recipients of Christ's message as unbelievers who lived during the time of Noah. Did Jesus preach to these unbelievers back before the flood? But why would he preach only to unbelievers in that situation? Why did he not also preach to the believing patriarchs of the Old Testament, who could have profited from what he had to say? Why did he preach only before the flood? All these questions suggest that the interpretation under consideration is badly off track.

There is good reason why 1 Peter 3 *cannot* teach any kind of postmortem evangelism. The context finds Peter urging Christians to

remain faithful in their evangelism and witness in spite of persecution. It would make no sense for Peter to say this and at the same time tell the persecuted Christians that the unbelievers behind all their suffering will have a second chance to be saved after they die.

Sanders responds that Peter's words are designed to discourage Christians from worldly living,[39] but he is surely missing the point. Why would Peter urge Christians to persist in their witness to Christ if these same unbelievers will be given a chance to be saved after they die? If Peter intended to acknowledge PME anywhere in his epistle, this would be the place to do so. The fact that Peter does not strongly suggests that postmortem evangelism was not part of his understanding of the Christian faith.

What then was Peter talking about? Some understand 1 Peter 3 to say that Christ preached to the lost while he was alive, and those lost people were figuratively in prison; and that Christ's preaching to the lost was analogous to Noah's preaching to the lost before the flood. Another interpretation suggests that 1 Peter 3:19 speaks of how the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet 1:11) spoke through Noah (2 Pet 2:5) to men and women who are now in a prison of judgment. They were judged for their disobedience and are suffering the consequences. Through Noah's preaching they were exposed to the light, but they rejected it. In neither of these more plausible interpretations is there the slightest indication of any postmortem chance at salvation.

Other Issues Regarding Postmortem Evangelization

Advocates of PME refer to statements that suggest the early church believed that between Jesus' death and resurrection he "descended into hell." This phrase, of course, appears in the Apostles' Creed, and many of us have repeated it many times. They then attempt to link Jesus' alleged "descent into hell" with Peter's words in 1 Peter 3—4. As we have seen, however, 1 Peter 3:18—4:6 cannot mean what PME advocates want it to mean; hence it cannot be relevant to the creed's reference to Jesus' descending into hell.

One assumption often underlying claims that Jesus descended into hell between the cross and his resurrection is the thought that his substitutionary atonement for our sins required him to take all our punishment on himself. And since the punishment we deserved included hell, it was necessary for him actually to take our place in hell. Several things trouble me about this assumption. The most serious objection concerns the failure of many to recognize that Christ suffered the torment of hell while hanging on the cross. After all, what constitutes hell is the fact that the sinner is separated from God. When we ask where Jesus experienced this separation from God as part of his suffering for us, the answer is clear: at the moment he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). These are the words of a lost soul, and they undoubtedly will be the same words that many humans in hell cry when they finally realize what their sin has brought them to. There is absolutely no need to think that the "descent of Christ into hell" required him to suffer anything more after the anguish of the cross.

Another issue: advocates of PME believe that people are lost because they have rejected Christ. Once this is assumed, it seems to follow that unevangelized people who have never had a chance to reject or accept Christ must be given that opportunity after death. But the assumption is false. The reason people are lost is clearly described in Romans 3: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"; "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (vv. 23, 10). Rejecting Christ is not a condition for being lost. We are lost already (Ps 51:5; Eph 2:1-3).

While the early Christian writing known as *2 Clement* is not part of the New Testament, it nonetheless reflects the thinking of Christians during the church's first century. It states that "after we have gone out of the world, no further power of confessing or repenting will there belong to us" (8:3). It is possible that this assertion became necessary because some, as the first century drew to a close, raised the possibility of salvation after death. The reason comments as clear as *2 Clement* 8:3 do not appear in the New Testament may be that they simply were

not needed among members of a community whose every action recognized that physical death marked the boundary of human salvific opportunity.

One place to see this first-century conviction at work is in the seventh chapter of Matthew. In verses 13-14 Jesus warns his listeners of the broad road and the wide gate that lead to destruction, and then he urges them to be among the few that enter the narrow gate and follow the narrow road that leads to life. There is no suggestion of an opportunity for salvation after death in these words. Then Jesus issues a warning about false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15-20) and concludes by saying, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." The emphasis, once again, is on what occurs during an earthly lifetime.

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus speaks of those who will come to him at the judgment saying, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" In response, Jesus says, he will tell them plainly, "I never knew you; away from me, you evildoers." Once again, postmortem judgment is based upon premortem conditions. The point likewise appears in Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus' well-known story of the men who built their respective houses on rock and sand.

We would do well also to study Jesus' parables in Matthew 13. Explaining the parable of the weeds (vv. 24-30, 36-43), Jesus says, "Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers." The sin and evil referred to pertain to things done prior to death. There are no qualifications in this or other passages; there are no hints of exceptions arising from events after death. A similar point is made in Matthew 24:41-46.

While we are examining Jesus' teaching, we should look at his story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Advocates of PME may well wish to discount this passage. It is a parable, and we all know,

they argue, how difficult parables can be to interpret. Their major line of argument against those who think Luke 16:19-31 is relevant to the issue of judgment after death is to claim that the parable's context suggests the story's primary message deals with improper uses of wealth. But even if this were so, the parable's lessons about judgment after death are hardly incidental and irrelevant. After all, this story was told by the Master Teacher, who could hardly have been unaware of how easily the details would lead many to form judgments about the status of the rich man and Lazarus following their deaths. Luke 16:19-31 cannot easily be dismissed as a source for the belief that postmortem judgment is based upon premortem conditions.

In all these passages and more, one simple point stands out: Physical death marks the boundary of human opportunity for salvation. Anyone who wishes to argue that Jesus and the authors of the New Testament believed otherwise must shoulder the burden of proof. Given the serious implications of a belief in postmortem salvation, the total silence of Scripture regarding opportunities after death should trouble evangelical advocates.

By way of conclusion, it is worth remembering Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment." Many proponents of PME claim that this is the only New Testament text that even comes close to naming death as the boundary of human opportunity. But of course we have already seen that this is not true. Nothing in Hebrews 9:27 teaches that one's judgment follows immediately upon one's death. Rather, the verse gives the order as death first and judgment second. The judgment comes after death, but nothing is said about how long after death it occurs. Once that is settled, it is clear that the intent of the verse is to show that the judgment of each human being reflects that person's standing with God at the moment of death.

The Pesky Problem of Christian Missions

Where inclusivism and the doctrine of postmortem salvation are

concerned, the problem of Christian missions simply will not go away. Many Christians who encounter inclusivism and PME for the first time find it easy to think that these positions weaken missionary and evangelistic resolve. Whether or not that conclusion is justified, I am struck by an extremely ironic consequence of this book's other two theories. I have in mind here people who think the primary reason any person is lost is the fact that he or she never had an opportunity to hear and accept the good news about Jesus in this life. According to inclusivism, such people may still be saved if their lives reflect the so-called "faith principle." According to the doctrine of PME, those people who never had their first chance at the gospel in this life will be awarded that chance after death.

But notice what happens to many of these people when a missionary, at great personal sacrifice, leaves home and family to bring the gospel to their village. If then they hear but refuse to believe, the primary consequence of the missionary's sacrifice is to assure their condemnation. If the missionary had stayed away and continued to enjoy the comforts of home, the eternal hope of the unevangelized would never have been jeopardized. The possibility of their salvation would have remained a live option under the conditions of the inclusivist and PME theories that we've examined. But once they hear and reject the gospel, they really are condemned, since they no longer fall under the protective umbrella of inclusivism or PME.

I assume that John Sanders and Gabriel Fackre hold more sophisticated versions of their positions. Nonetheless, it would be comforting to hear each of them spell out their way of avoiding this rather bizarre consequence of some ways of formulating their theories.

Putting this problem aside, I agree with John Sanders that "just because some people feel it a crucial motivating factor to believe all the unevangelized are lost does not make it true that they are lost. Besides, there may be good reasons to continue missionary activity even if there is hope for the unevangelized without it."[40] We agree that the utility of a theory or practice does not establish its truth. Of course

a sword this sharp cuts both ways. It also rules out any attempts to sway people by appealing to their emotions. The fact that inclusivism or PME makes people feel better doesn't make either theory true.

Personally, I avoid any suggestion that the possibly negative implications of our other two theories for evangelism and missions would prove the falsity of those doctrines. Yet even Sanders and Fackre would admit, I am sure, that a widespread acceptance of their theories would provide many with a powerful disincentive to endure the sacrifices required to take the gospel to many places on our planet. While such a consequence does not prove that inclusivism or PME is false, it is hardly unimportant. I believe those doctrines are false for reasons entirely separate from their implications for missions. But there is a big difference between harmless and harmful false beliefs.

I close my thoughts on missions with the following comments. (1) I agree with Sanders that whatever effect inclusivism might have on evangelism and missions fails to prove that inclusivism is false. (2) However, other sections of this long chapter provide ample reasons for thinking inclusivism and PME *are* false. (3) It is one thing for a theory to be false; harmless errors can sometimes be ignored. But errors that strongly dispose people toward actions that can compromise the church's mission on earth and place obstacles in the way of evangelism are too serious to ignore or excuse.

Learning from the Book of Acts

It is interesting what one can learn by reading the entire book of Acts with inclusivism in mind. As one examines the messages delivered by Peter, Philip, Paul and others in Acts, it may prove helpful to place oneself in their sandals and ask whether their deeds and statements are the sorts of things one might expect from inclusivists. As an experiment, I approached Acts in this way. Even I was surprised by what I discovered.

For example, I wonder whether an inclusivist would have felt free to alter Peter's words in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every

one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." Pinnock's "faith principle" is noticeably absent from Peter's message. Peter's words clearly assume that everyone in his audience was unsaved and unforgiven. Unlike Peter, inclusivists are strangely silent on the matter of the sin problem for people they regard as "unevangelized believers." Peter certainly did not speak like someone who thought that some in his audience might already be saved simply because they had been faithfully seeking God as best they could up to that point.

I'm not sure if Paul had been an inclusivist that he would have answered the famous question of the Philippian jailer as he did. When the jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), a good inclusivist might well have advised him to calm down and check to see if he might not be already saved. Perhaps the inclusivist and the jailer would dialogue for a while and reexamine his relationship to the saving content of general revelation. It seems likely that many inclusivists would have avoided uttering Paul's severely restricting statement, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Even the most cursory reading of Acts will reveal the extent to which the messages it reproduces emphasize the death and resurrection of Jesus. Inclusivists, as we have seen, insist that the gospel does not have these two events as its central focus. But if some other gospel—one making no reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus—would serve just as well, why did all those early gospel messages always emphasize the same things: that Christ died for our sins and rose again?

Had Paul been an inclusivist, I cannot imagine him uttering the words he spoke to an audience of Jews who had just rejected the gospel: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and *judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life,* we are now turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). In these words Paul indicates not that his audience's loss of eternal life became effective at that moment, but that his listeners were devoid of it prior

to hearing the gospel. As far as Paul could tell, their names were not written in the book of life (see Rev 17:8).

How could an inclusivist or proponent of PME have said what Paul states in Acts 20:26-27: "Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God"? If Paul had not been faithful in proclaiming the gospel, he would have had blood on his hands. This is no way for an inclusivist or advocate of PME to think. Even if Christians fail to carry the gospel to the unevangelized, we are led to believe, there is little or no culpability regarding "the blood of any of you," because God is saving unevangelized people all the time. A similar observation applies to proponents of PME, who expect the unevangelized to hear the gospel after death.

And had I been an inclusivist, I would have been totally shocked by what God said when he called Paul: "I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17-18).

Even a quick journey like this through the book of Acts makes it clear that Peter and Paul did not speak and act like inclusivists or PME advocates. Acts 26:17-18 helps us see that *God* does not sound like one either.

Conclusion

Now I invite you, reader, to reflect on the spiritual condition of Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. Saul, I submit, passed every test of inclusivist salvation. He satisfied Clark Pinnock's faith principle with plenty to spare. Not only did Saul believe that God existed, but he was also diligently seeking him. In fact, he sought Yahweh with such diligence that he participated in the persecution and execution of Yahweh's enemies (Acts 22:20).

It is appropriate to reread Paul's own description of his preconversion zeal for God (Acts 26:4-5; Phil 3:4-6). If inclusivism is true, then

Saul the Pharisee was saved. But this judgment was not shared by the divinely inspired writer Paul the apostle (Phil 3:7-11). Even though Saul satisfied every requirement of inclusivist salvation, he was still a lost sinner (1 Tim 1:15).

When we begin with the premise "If *A*, then *B*" and then discover that *B* is false, we must conclude that *A* is also false. For example, if Ron Nash is the world's greatest golfer, then he must have won at least one golf tournament. But it is false that Nash has won at least one golf tournament. Therefore it must be false that Nash is the world's greatest golfer. Likewise, if inclusivism is true, then Saul of Tarsus was saved. But it is false that Saul was saved. Therefore inclusivism is not true.

Inclusivism and the doctrine of PME are becoming influential positions among evangelicals at the end of the twentieth century. Given the weaknesses of these views, it seems obvious that inclusivist and PME evangelicals need to think further on these matters. For many of them, I suspect, their theories appear to be a relatively painless way to resolve difficulties about the fate of the unevangelized; the theories can certainly make a powerful appeal to our emotions. But their adoption carries an extremely high theological price tag. While their premises are highly speculative, their conclusions are hardly theologically harmless.[41]

Response to Nash

JOHN SANDERS

LET ME BEGIN BY SAYING THAT I WISH PROFESSOR NASH HAD CLEARly stated the restrictivist position and made a constructive case for it. The format of a multiviews book is supposed to contain just such a constructive presentation of each view. Instead what we have are two views and an extended critique. Nash defends his methodology by arguing that we come to know what a particular view stands for by comparing it with different views. This is true as far as it goes. Studying the heresies surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity is helpful for understanding it. But that does not rule out the need for a positive case to be put forth. Merely criticizing the views of others does not inform the reader of precisely what is the view of the author. Nash, moreover, simply assumes his view is the correct one and needs no defense. But would it make sense if, in a multiviews book on the millennium, one author claimed that amillennialism is the biblical view and, instead of expounding that position, simply attacked premillennialism and postmillennialism?

This presumption of correctness leads Nash to claim that Fackre and I are presenting "a totally new understanding of how God saves the lost." Nash either is simply unaware of or suffers from historical

amnesia regarding the theologians, clergy and laity in the evangelical tradition who have held to the wider hope. It is shrewd rhetoric on Nash's part to make it sound as if I am attempting to foist off some unheard-of view on an unsuspecting public. Inclusivism, however, has been defended by thinkers as old as the early church father Justin Martyr, as solidly orthodox as John Wesley, as Baptist as A. H. Strong, as Reformed as William Shedd and as evangelical as Bernard Ramm. Moreover, surveys show that inclusivism vies with restrictivism for dominance among the evangelical public at large.[1] Nash cites a second-century writer who supports one of his arguments while ignoring all the well-known historical figures who affirm inclusivism. By this he seeks to create the impression that inclusivism was not thought of until some aberrant evangelicals came up with it in the late twentieth century.

In any case, the fact that restrictivism is the most popular view does not make it true. Many conservative evangelicals in the nineteenth century, for instance, defended slavery as *the* biblical and traditional (most popular) view in North America.[2] Obviously they were misled—for quite some time, too—in their interpretation of the Bible. The same situation prevails, in my opinion, regarding a restrictivist interpretation of Scripture.

Nash's essay makes a number of specific criticisms regarding inclusivism. Space limitations prevent me from answering all of them, so I will focus on those that space permits.

The Question of Old Testament Believers

Nash argues that the death and resurrection of Jesus are not essential to inclusivism. This is a clear misunderstanding of the position. Repeatedly in my essay I said that no person, whether Abraham or Peter, is saved apart from the atonement of Christ. Without the work of Jesus there would be no salvation. Nash fails to grasp that people such as Moses or the unevangelized can be saved, and are only saved, by the work of Jesus even if they never heard of Jesus.

Nash rejects this idea, maintaining that Old Testament believers knew about the work of Jesus through its foreshadowing in the sacrificial system. That Old Testament believers looked forward to God's bringing about dramatic changes in human history is not disputed, but it hardly seems likely that they knew as much about the particular person and work of Jesus that Nash claims. They simply did not know the gospel as we know it after Jesus. And, it should be noted, they did *not* believe in Jesus Christ! If, as Nash holds, those who confess Jesus as Savior (group A) are identical with those who are saved (group B), then the Old Testament believers are not saved, for they did not confess Jesus as Savior.

In fact, Nash's argument from Romans 1—3 rules out hope not only for the unevangelized but also for all those (including Jews) before Christ who did not confess him. He sees Paul as teaching that God can be known from general revelation, but all Gentiles nonetheless reject God (are sinners). Hence general revelation is bad news, bringing only condemnation in its wake. Unfortunately, the same sort of argument from Romans 1—3 will apply to the Old Testament saints: God can be known from *special* revelation, but all Jews nonetheless reject God (are sinners). Hence special revelation is bad news for them, bringing only condemnation. The restrictivist interpretation of Romans logically consigns to damnation all those living before Jesus.

Nash will, of course, object that he affirms the salvation of the Old Testament believers, since they had at least some biblical revelation. But here the waters turn murky. If they did not need to confess Jesus, then how much revelation, and precisely *what* revelation, was needed for someone before Jesus to be saved? It is here that I see continuity between Old Testament believers and the unevangelized. Neither group possessed the complete revelation of God in Jesus, but God was reaching out to both groups through the varieties of divine revelation, seeking a faith response to the Spirit's initiatives.

Another problem for Nash's interpretation of Romans arises from his insistence that anyone living after the time of Jesus' resurrection

must believe in it in order to be saved. Thus a new required content of belief is established for those living after the resurrection. What, then, of those Jewish believers (in the Old Testament sense) who died two hours after the resurrection but failed to hear of it? Are they damned? What of those who died two years after the event but never heard of Jesus' death, such as those who had heard only of John the Baptist's baptism (Acts 19:1-7)? Such people, according to Nash, were once heaven-bound because they had faith in the old content of belief but, it would seem, are now hell-bound for living too long. If only they had died a few hours or years prior to Jesus' death, they would have been saved. An unfortunate situation indeed.

In my view, such people are saved even though they are on the sliding scale of knowledge regarding what God is doing in the world. The Gentile unevangelized are simply further down the knowledge scale. God holds people accountable for what they have been given, not for what they have failed to hear (Lk 12:48).

The Question of Believing Jews

Concerning the salvation of believing Jews, Nash thinks he raises a critical objection when he claims that inclusivists must admit that Saul of Tarsus was saved before Jesus encountered him on the Damascus Road. Several points need to be made in response.

First, it is not in my power or anyone else's to say definitively who is and who is not saved. That right belongs to God. There were believing Jews, but whether Saul was one of them is open to conjecture.

Second, even if we concede for the sake of argument that Saul was saved before meeting Jesus, Nash's objection hardly counts. Nash says Paul admitted to being a "sinner." So did King David, the "man after God's own heart"! In fact, the Old Testament is replete with examples of great people of faith who were marked by serious sin—in David's case, adultery and murder. When we look at the list of the "heroes of faith" in Hebrews 11, we find people such as Samson, Jacob and

Gideon, who had serious moral and spiritual lapses along with very limited understandings of God and his program, yet they were still people of faith.

The difference between Saul and Paul is that once he met Jesus, he realized, to his utter shame, that though he had thought he was serving God, he had actually been working against God's plan. Such realizations are not unknown among us Christians. Paul's admission that he is the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) is similar to David's confession in Psalm 51. After Jesus confronted him and Paul began to grasp what Jesus had done for humanity, he came to see that his former life was nothing compared to the surpassing riches of knowing Christ. Once he understood who Jesus was and the redemption he brought, Paul says, his former understanding of the divine program and his service in that program amounted to nothing, for they were incomparable to what Christ Jesus has done (Phil 3:7-11). If Nash would read this last text carefully, he would see that Paul says only that he considers Jesus incomparable to all else, not that Paul was unsaved.

Cornelius and Other Gentiles

The same sort of situation holds true regarding Cornelius in Acts 10. Pointing out that God wanted Cornelius to hear about Jesus, Nash criticizes my claim that Cornelius was already saved before Peter arrived. But Nash raises this issue because he apparently cannot conceive any reason for telling someone about Jesus unless that person is hell-bound. Nash believes that unless a person is damned, he or she has no need to know about the grace of God in Christ Jesus. I believe there are people who are hell-bound who need to hear what Christ has done for them, but there are also those, like Abraham, David and Cornelius, who are heaven-bound and yet would be greatly blessed in coming to know Jesus the Savior.

Inclusivism maintains that there is more than one reason for evangelism. Those unevangelized, like Cornelius or John the Baptist's followers, who genuinely trust in God have not experienced the

fullness of salvation that comes from a relationship with Jesus. God is easy to please but hard to satisfy. He is pleased with those who exhibit faith in him, but he is not satisfied until they attain maturity in Christ.

But what of those who, unlike Cornelius, did not even know about God's work in the Old Testament? Can God reach them? Paul thought so, and for the same reasons just mentioned. In Acts 17 Paul preached to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers of Athens. Nash claims that since Paul quoted only one Greek thinker in his sermon, he had no sympathy for Stoic thought. Discussing this text in my chapter, I cited some detailed studies that demonstrate that most of Paul's message would find agreement in both the Old Testament and Stoic teaching.[3] True, Paul quotes from only one Stoic poet, but the bulk of his ideas and the very wording of them can be found in Stoicism. For instance, Paul says that the entire human race is one offspring from God and that God is providential over creation. Both were key ideas in Stoicism. Moreover, Paul declares that the God these philosophers worship is the one he wants to tell them more about (Acts 17:23). Having overlooked their ignorance of what God is doing, he says, God is now informing them of what he has done in the person of Jesus. In my view Paul is finding common ground between the philosophers and the biblical revelation on the basis of general revelation, and then going on to inform his listeners of what God has done though Christ.

The Role of General Revelation

Nash disregards this role of general revelation. We do need to be suspicious of an uncontrolled use of general revelation, given what the deistic thinkers of the eighteenth century did with it. On the other hand, we must not ignore God's gracious gift of creational revelation, as did the Gnostics. God does reach people through his witness in creation, but he wants much more for their lives. He desires that we all receive the blessing that can come only through a personal relationship with Jesus.

Regarding the inclusivist claim that God reaches some people redemptively through general revelation, Nash says this implies that one can earn salvation on the basis of good works. However, this is a misunderstanding of my position. In my chapter I pointed out that this was not the case, but let me do so again. No one is saved because of his or her merits, but only because of the work of Jesus. Abraham was saved by divine grace due only to the redemption offered through Christ. Any person who is saved, whether it be an Old Testament saint, an unevangelized believer or a Christian, is saved only by the work of Jesus. A proper *response* to divine grace entails seeking to live out the divine will, to whatever extent it is known, in effective action.

Infants and Unevangelized Adults

Another misunderstanding needs to be cleared up. In my essay I made a connection between God's extending the opportunity of salvation to infants who die and God's giving a similar opportunity to unevangelized adults. Nash thinks this means that since infants are "innocent" of sin, the adult unevangelized are held innocent as well. What I said, however, was that adult unevangelized are sinners before God and are not "innocent." They are sinners in need of atonement, but God, in grace, seeks to save such sinners.

Nash argues that infants who die are most likely saved, since they have no personal sin, but that adult unevangelized are lost, since they have personal guilt. In that case, infants who are murdered are better off: their salvation is secured, since they never had a chance to grow up and commit a personal sin. Nash's position means that all those throughout history who died in infancy in unevangelized countries are saved, while those unfortunate enough to live into adulthood are damned. Apparently God loves these children and saves them through Christ but does not love the adults, for he does not make eternal salvation available to them at all. In my view God loves both groups and, on the basis of Jesus' atonement, seeks the salvation of both.

The Missionary Question

Nash claims inclusivism implies that the sending of missionaries is bad news for the unevangelized, since if they hear the gospel and reject it, they are now lost, whereas they were possibly saved before the missionaries arrived. Again, several points need to be made in response.

First, I never said that *all* unevangelized people are saved. Some unevangelized are believers in God, while others are not. Moreover, some of those who previously had not heard the gospel embrace it upon hearing it, while others turn away. Some unbelieving unevangelized reject the gospel when it is made known to them. It is my contention that *unevangelized believers* will accept the gospel once they come to understand it. This, however, may take awhile, because the gospel is not always immediately understood. Crosscultural communication can be difficult, and, it must be admitted, sometimes we poorly communicate the gospel. At times in history it was not the gospel that was rejected but rather Western imperialism (missionaries have not always been careful to make this distinction). In any case, inclusivists affirm that those who already believe among the unevangelized will eventually come to faith in Christ once they are evangelized.

The subject of missions raises a problem for the restrictivist. According to restrictivism, adult unevangelized can be saved only if they hear the gospel from human missionaries. If no missionaries go to them, they are all damned. Because of the failure of Christians, they are not given the opportunity for salvation. This means that Christian sinfulness makes God unable to save those he desires to save. It makes no sense to say God does all he can to save all individuals if he allows some of them to be damned through unfavorable circumstances.

But Nash has two responses to this objection. First, he says the unevangelized are justly condemned to hell due to their own sin. Because they are sinners, God does not have to save them or even try to save them. I have no disagreement with this stance on God's retributive justice (punishment of sin), since it is only by grace that

any of us are saved. Where I differ is that I understand Christ as taking on the Father's retributive justice for us all on the cross. Moreover, divine justice is not only retributive but *distributive* as well (restrictivists typically ignore this aspect). God's distributive justice seeks to distribute the good of Jesus' redemption to all of humanity, not just a few. Hence God makes the salvation Jesus secured available to every single individual who has ever lived.

Nash's second way out of this objection is simply to deny that God desires to save every single individual. Rather, God only wants to save some from various groups, such as Jews and Gentiles, males and females. Nash interprets Scriptures such as God "desires everyone to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4) and God is "not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9) to refer to the human race in general, not every individual in particular. Accordingly, Jesus did not die for everyone but only for those whom God specifically chooses. Otherwise Jesus' blood would be wasted on unbelievers. Would God be foolish enough to die for those who never exercise faith in him?

Here we meet a crucial difference between Nash's view and my own. Nash does not believe God grants all sinners, as sinners, the opportunity for salvation. He believes God can save those he desires to be saved, since he only wants those saved who hear the gospel. Nash does not believe God wants the unevangelized saved. If God wanted them saved, they would hear the gospel from missionaries. Obviously if they die never hearing the gospel, then God did not desire their salvation. According to restrictivism, all those dying unevangelized are necessarily damned to hell because they sinned against God, and they have no opportunity for salvation since they never hear of Jesus.

I have a fundamentally different view of divine grace, mercy, justice and love. I understand the New Testament to mean that God, in gracious love, desires the salvation of every single human who has ever lived on this planet. God's distributive justice provides every individual with an opportunity to be saved. In grace and justice Jesus died for sinners, and in grace and justice that redemption is applied to

those evangelized who confess Christ *and* those unevangelized believers who exercise faith in God despite their limited understanding. I do not see a split between God's love and justice. Rather, God justly carries out his love toward sinners.

What Is God Like?

It seems to me that restrictivists have a split view of God. On the one hand is the God of general revelation and justice, who is very angry and disapproving of sinners. On the other hand is the Father of our Lord Jesus, who loves sinners and suffers on their behalf. The God of general revelation cannot be gracious until the gospel arrives. The God who is omnipresent throughout the creation is hostile toward sinners, while the God incarnate in Jesus is favorably disposed toward sinners. This is all very similar to the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.

Contrary to this position, I maintain that the God of creation is the same God of redemption. The triune God who is everywhere present searches for the lone lost sheep. The merciful Father whom Jesus revealed so dramatically is the same God of creation who communicates his love and grace even when known only through general revelation. God does not love people only when missionaries arrive on the scene. The Spirit blows where he wills and can reach the unevangelized. Jesus died for every single individual, and the Father can have mercy on whom he desires to have mercy (Rom 9:18). Fortunately for every single one of us sinners, he desires to show mercy to *all* (Rom 11:32).

Response to Nash

GABRIEL FACKRE

WE LEARN FROM RONALD NASH'S CHAPTER WHAT RESTRICTIVISM IS *not.* Why is there so little about what this theory *is?* Is the answer in the book *Is Jesus Our Only Savior?* from which many of these pages are taken? No. That work also is an extended polemic against alternatives rather than a developed statement of restrictivism (there called "exclusivism").

Perhaps no careful case is made for restrictivism/exclusivism because it is so difficult to do so persuasively. I hope to show that restrictivism as presented by Nash is not a coherent point of view, and that many of its assertions do not pass muster biblically.

Nash is right, however, about some basic things. Let's turn first to these positives.

1a. Faith in Jesus Christ is fundamental to personal salvation. As our Reformation forebears taught, saving faith is knowledge of Christ as well as trust in him. The numerous New Testament assertions of this that I listed in my chapter are evidence of this contention. As all human beings are by nature fallen, the coming of the eternal Son of God is good news to sinners, who outside of this revelation do not know about their Savior.

2a. "General revelation" is given by the common grace of God for purposes other than personal salvation. In the sweep of biblical history, the gift of Noah's covenant was given in order to sustain the rebel world with small seeds of light and power as God prepares us for the saving work of Christ.

3a. Unquestionably, Scripture's accent on personal faith is for making the decision of faith in *this* life, not in the next life.

4a. Exegesis is fundamental to finding biblical answers to the question of the destiny of the unreached.

Granted the strengths of Nash's view, what are its weaknesses? First consider certain basic but undeveloped premises, which must be ferreted out here with some help from Nash's other writings.

1b. Out of the whole human race lost in original sin and deserving condemnation, the plan of God is to save some by the person and work of Christ. The rest are passed over.

2b. "No one can be saved unless he or she knows the information about Jesus' person and work contained in the Gospel and unless he or she exercises explicit faith in Jesus Christ."[1] This act of faith can only be made by a believer before death.

3b. Next to the bold and clear point of view stated in these two points, Nash tucks in an interesting "P.S.": well, there is the matter of infants who die before the age of discretion. They can be saved (*are* saved!) without making an act of conscious faith. And again, there are the mentally incompetent, who do not have to make a conscious act of faith. Both "are included within the circle of God's saving grace."[2] And by the way, there is another exception to point 2b on the necessity of explicit faith in Christ: "When asked if there will be people in heaven who never had a chance to hear the gospel during their lifetime, the first thing a wise exclusivist will say is that he does not know."[3]

Logic in theological argument, which Nash rightly insists on, must observe the law of noncontradiction. My first question to Nash is: How is point 2b not in flagrant contradiction to the cluster of assertions in point 3b? You cannot have it both ways: either explicit faith in Jesus

Christ is necessary for salvation (2b), or it is not necessary because the salvation of deceased infants and the mentally incompetent is certain, and the salvation of "people who never had a chance to hear the gospel in their lifetime" is possible (3b).

Ironically, the abandonment of the necessity of "explicit faith in Jesus Christ" in point 3b puts Nash in the very inclusivist camp he attacks for not requiring such knowledge of, and conscious commitment to, Jesus Christ. Considering the high rates of infant mortality since the world's beginnings and the latitude allowable in Nash's "maybe-maybe not" agnosticism about the unreached, heaven could be more populated by this alleged restrictivism than by either a rigorous inclusivism or a standard-brand divine perseverance view—both of which allow for large-scale nos to whatever light is given. (Sanders's version of inclusivism seems to be much more confident about the optimal number responding to the light they have than is logically required by his "fair play" argument.)

Back to 1 Peter

Nash's principal criticism of divine perseverance ("PME") has to do with its (1) failure to *attempt* exegesis of the relevant passages in 1 Peter 3 and 4 and/or (2) failure to make a *convincing* exegesis of them, especially with respect to the "totally alien subject matter" of 1 Peter 4:1-5.

Pages 81-86 of this book provide a careful exegesis of the chapters in question. They show that the preaching of Christ to the unreached of Noah's covenant (3:19-20 and 4:6) is a breach of death's walls by Jesus Christ, a perseverance that brooks no opposition, comparable to the victory over death that gave hope to the suffering Christians who were recipients of the letter. Both are words of *eschatological* hope, hope in the world to come—one for the sufferer and the other for the unreached.

The imperatives of 4:1-5 are natural companions of the indicatives of hope for sufferers throughout the letter: You are now in Christ,

therefore be what you are; persevere to the end as Christ does. Not to do so is to relapse into your previous state before you had heard the gospel, like those who know only the covenant with Noah and fail to keep it. You've heard the gospel, so don't backslide! The Noah covenant people haven't heard it, so must hear it for the first time and decide accordingly.[4]

God and Scripture

In the end, the difference between the formal teaching of restrictivism (when not compromised by the "P.S." noted above) and the belief in divine perseverance has to do with understandings of the nature of God and views on the interpretation of Scripture.

According to a canonical interpretation of the Bible employing the analogy of faith noted in my chapter, the good news is about the mercy of a just God toward sinners, wrought on Calvary and available to believers by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Since God is just as well as loving, no one will be denied the good news, no one excluded from hearing the saving Word and making a decision for Christ. "Whosoever will, may come."

This is a different way of thinking about the God of the Bible from one that restricts salvation to only the small portion of the human race that, according to God's plan, must depend on our determined, but finally limited, efforts to get the Word out. What we can't do, Jesus Christ will do. Divine perseverance means not only a *wideness* to God's mercy but also a *length* to it. Jesus Christ, breaching the very boundary of death, will patiently pursue the last and the least, proclaiming the Word to the unreached.

The Question of Missions

Should the missionary have "stayed away and continued to enjoy the comforts of home"? No! First, salvation by grace through faith brings countless blessings in *this* world. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). While those still unreached will not be denied thereby the possibility of salvation in *eternity,* they will not have the benefits of salvation in *time.* The missionary who has found a pearl of great price will want others to share it right now.

Second, not to respond to the call to mission by the Holy Spirit would mean a painful accountability of the missionary to the divine Caller on Judgment Day. Third, if the hearer's answer to the gospel is destined to be no—with all the consequences that follow—it does not make any difference when it is made, to a missionary now or to the persevering Christ then. The missionary proclamation advances the possibilities of the blessings of eternal salvation here and now, rather than foreclosing some fictitious "live option."

Furthermore, God is *just.* No preaching by Christ to the dead is going to make it "easier" for the dead than the living! To suggest that a missionary might not go now, since a quick yes can be expected later, violates the justice of Jesus Christ.

For the three reasons cited in my chapter, belief in divine perseverance is *not* a disincentive to evangelism. A true call of God to spread the gospel comes from these incentives:

☐ the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit

☐ the outer testimony of Holy Scripture—its call to obey the charge to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19)

☐ the knowledge that the blessings of changed lives (and a changed society) come as results of a faithful and fruitful evangelism

Romans 10:9-10, Acts 4:12 and John 14:6 are, indeed, "bedrock" biblical convictions. Contrary to Nash's charge, believers in divine perseverance hold them to be true in the same sense that historic Christianity asserts. Personal salvation is inseparable from the confession of Christ (Acts 4:12; Rom 10:9-10). And Jesus Christ is the way, truth and life (Jn 14:6)—the singular saving deed of God (reconciliation), the singular disclosure of God (revelation) and the singular deliverance of God (salvation).[5] It is simply wrong to say this view is a call "to reshuffle the deck and commit ourselves to a totally

new understanding of how God saves the lost."

The Question of Revelation

While "PME" is grounded in the evangelical essentials just cited, it does presuppose Puritan John Robinson's belief that "ever-new light and truth breaks from God's holy Word." It took hundreds of years of soaking time for the Christian church to gain clarity about the Trinity and the person of Christ. Growth in understanding aspects of the gospel takes time.

In all cases of "new light and truth," the fresh insights are always firmly connected to the older light and truth. They are part of a trajectory coming out of the past, staying on the same course, extending it further. The affirmation of divine perseverance is no "remarkable shift" but instead a step forward on a line in continuity with historic teaching, a truth latent in Scripture now struggling to be made patent.

The Question of Faith

While Nash's closing comment about Paul is directed to inclusivists, a flaw in his logic needs to be noted. The argument assumes that Saul's life of works-righteousness is the equivalent of Paul's saving faith. Most inclusivists I know—including Roman Catholics who espouse Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christianity"—sharply distinguish between "implicit faith" and moralism. Zeal, belief and good works are not the same as the deep-down trust of the heart that I understand Rahnerians and inclusivists mean when they speak about saving faith, whether Christian faith or "wider" faith.

Ronald Nash is right in what he affirms, but wrong in what he denies. He is right, when consistent, to assert the necessity of faith in Christ for personal salvation. He is, I believe, wrong when he denies the scriptural testimony to the perseverance of Christ in proclaiming the good news and making the offer of salvation to all, for whosoever will may come.

Notes

Introduction/Sanders

[1]Quoted by Augustine in his letter to Deogratias. See Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* series 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 1:416.

[2]These figures are taken from *World Christian Encyclopedia,* cited in *World Evangelization* 16 (1989): 40.

[3]John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

[4]This is the reason I coined the term *restrictivism* in my book *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992). Another term was needed in order to distinguish exclusivism from the belief that salvation is restricted to those who hear the gospel from a human agent and place their faith in Jesus before they die. Hence restrictivism is a subcategory of exclusivism, but the two are not identical.

[5]See Carl F. H. Henry, "Is It Fair?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard,* ed. James Sigountos and William Crockett (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), pp. 245-55, and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/3 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1969), pp. 461-78.

[6]All these positions are discussed in detail, with extensive bibliographies, in my *No Other Name,* but following are some brief references. On the first, see Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 2. 2. Q2. A7 and *Disputed Questions* Q14. A11; Norm Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 32. On the middle knowledge solution, see Evert Osburn, "Those Who Have Never Heard: Have They No Hope?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (September 1989): 368; and William Craig, "No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (April 1989): 176. On the final option theory, see Roger Troisfontaines, *I Do Not Die,* trans. Francis Albert (New York: Desclee, 1963); Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death,* trans. Gregory Bainbridge (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965). Also see John R. W. Stott in David Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 327; J. I. Packer in *Christianity Today,* January 17, 1986, p. 25; Origen *De Principiis* 1. 6. 1.; John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); and Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985).

[7]For documentation, see Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 20-25 and the historical bibliographies.

[8]That people within various denominations and theological categories hold to a wide diversity of views on the unevangelized is documented in Sanders, *No Other Name.*

Inclusivism/Sanders

[1]Augustine, *The City of God,* trans. Marcus Dodds (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 783 (21. 12).

[2]William Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan), 2:712. Shedd admits that some Calvinists affirm that the number of saved is small in comparison to the damned, but he cites a number of leading Calvinists of his day who held to the "wider hope" along with him.

[3]B. B. Warfield, "Are They Few That Be Saved?" in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1952), p. 350. The ways by which Shedd and Warfield arrive at this conclusion are quite different. Shedd believes the number of saved will be large because people can be saved apart from knowledge of Christ. Warfield, rejecting such an idea, affirms the postmillennial doctrine that a tremendous surge of conversions will occur in the future. Since, he believed, the total population of the earth in the future will outnumber all the generations that preceded it, he concludes that more will be saved than lost.

[4]See John Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 84-128; and Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), pp. 78-80.

[5]See Roger Forster and Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1973); and Walter Kaiser, "Exodus," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary,* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990).

[6]This expression of God's anguished love for sinners is quite different from Jonathan Edwards's view that God hates sinners: "The God who holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you. . . . You are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours." From "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* 2 vols. (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 2:10.

[7]The following account is greatly indebted to Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke,* combined ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 158-206.

[8]This section is indebted to Robert Capon, *The Parables of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989).

[9]For more on this and a discussion of the similar parable in Luke, see Bailey, *Poet and Peasant,* 2:88-113.

[10]See F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 202-4; and Warfield, "Are They Few?"

[11]Capon, *Parables of Judgment,* p. 125.

[12]Ibid., p. 165.

[13]See Warfield, "Are They Few?" pp. 342-43.

[14]My main concern here is not primarily to defend the idea that more are saved than lost, but rather to show that the fewness texts do not rule out the wider hope. When the fewness texts are placed alongside the wideness texts, tensions arise if a restrictivist interpretation is given them. See Capon, *Parables of Judgment,* pp. 170-71, and Robert Capon, *The Parable of Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 109.

[15]I have grounded my argument in God's love toward sinners and not on the grounds of "fairness." Here I am in direct opposition to Carl Henry's "Is It Fair?" in *Through No Fault of Their Own?* ed. William Crockett and James Sigountos (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), pp. 253-55.

[16]There are varieties of inclusivism, ranging from the more liberal version of Karl Rahner to the more conservative stance of Clark Pinnock, which aligns well with my own. On these differences see my "Evangelical Responses to Salvation Outside the Church," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (September 1994): 45-58. forthcoming. Mikka Ruokanen demonstrates that my version is in harmony with the Second Vatican Council, while Rahner's goes far beyond it. See his *The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

[17]Cited in "Have They Not Heard?" *Eternity,* December 1976, p. 15.

[18]This is a particular problem for dispensational restrictivists, because a question arises concerning people living in the transition between dispensations. When do the new requirements of the "specific content of salvation" take effect? For instance, when did the requirement for belief in Jesus become obligatory? At the resurrection? At the ascension? What if a Jewish believer died a month after the resurrection but never heard of Jesus? What if a Gentile who feared God died a year after the ascension but never heard of Jesus? Are such people damned for failing to hear the *new* required content of belief? If a "grace period" is granted to people who are a dispensation behind (in terms of hearing), then why not a grace period for those unevangelized, who may be five or six dispensations behind?

[19]G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Revell, 1924), p. 281.

[20]I owe these insights to Terrance Tiessen.

[21]A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947), p. 842.

[22]See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Philosophy and the Bible: The Areopagus Speech," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (April 1992): 135-49; Bruce Winter, "In Public and in Private: Early Christian Interactions with Religious Pluralism," in *One God, One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism,* ed. Andrew Clarke and Bruce Winter (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 112-34.

[23]Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1981).

[24]C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 176; see also p. 65. Lewis believed God works through dreams, legends and conscience to reach

people (p. 54).

[25]Cited in Evan Gibson, *C. S. Lewis: Spinner of Tales* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 216.

[26]C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), pp. 164-65. More background for this may be found in C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 111, where Lewis argues that "honest rejection" of Christ may be forgiven.

[27]For more detail on this see my "Mercy to All: Romans 1-3 and the Destiny of the Unevangelized," *Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference* 1, no. 1 (1992): 216-28.

[28]Paul makes the same point in Ephesians 2:1-5, where he says "we" (Jews and Gentiles) were dead in sin but God has made "us" alive because of the work of Jesus. Hence if the text is used against Gentile unevangelized, we should conclude that premessianic Jews are damned.

[29]Ramesh Richard, *The Population of Heaven* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 113.

[30]See Augustine's *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins* and *On the Baptism of Infants.*

[31]From David Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 327.

[32]John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 88.

Response to Sanders/Fackre

[1]For discussion of this see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 30-45 and passim.

Response to Sanders/Nash

[1]I can only mention in passing my utter bewilderment about language that suggests that God was trying as hard as he could to convert Pharaoh. Sanders and other inclusivists seem unembarrassed by language that suggests obvious impotence on God's part.

[2]Truth and knowledge are opposite sides of the same coin. Without truth, propositional knowledge is impossible. The customary philosophical analysis of knowledge includes the fact that the propositions one believes are true. If one believes a proposition that is false, it is impossible for that belief to qualify as knowledge.

[3]For a lengthy argument defending the position Sanders opposes, see Ronald Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding* (Richardson, Tex.: Probe, 1992), chap. 8, and all of Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992).

[4]For a detailed analysis of the major forms of ancient Gnosticism, see Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Richardson, Tex.: Probe, 1992), pt. 3.

[5]General revelation might bring us to see this in the way C. S. Lewis describes in the early pages of his *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952). We discover the moral law within us and become conscious of guilt because of our failure to mirror that law in our conduct. We also become conscious that the moral order of the universe cannot be the product of a pantheistic or polytheistic setup. If we recognize the existence of a moral law that transcends our being and obliges us to behave in certain ways, then the Creator must also be the source of the moral law.

Divine Perseverance/Fackre

[1]For a summary of the issues and events as they came to a head in North America in the late nineteenth century, see Thomas P. Field,"The 'Andover Theory' of Future Probation," *The Andover Review* 7 (May 1887): 461-75; and Andover Seminary, *The Andover Case* (Boston: Stanley and Usher, 1887).

[2]The definition of who Christ is vis-à-vis God, held by most Christians and worked out at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

[3]For an explanation of perseverance in the "order of salvation," see John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 151-60.

[4]Benjamin W. Robinson, "First Peter," in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary,* ed. Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis and David Downey (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury, 1929), p. 1342.

[5]From the most conservative—Henry H. Haley, *Pocket Bible Handbook: An Abbreviated Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Author, 1941), pp. 434-37—to the most critical—Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord,* trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press), pp. 223-37.

[6]For a primer on the chapters in this story, see Dorothy and Gabriel Fackre, *Christian Basics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).

[7]John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 183-84.

[8]For current Lutheran thinking, see George Lindbeck, *"Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians: Contemporary Catholic and Protestant Positions," in *The Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church,* ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974), and George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 46-72. For a discussion of Lindbeck's views, see Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 200-205.

[9]Cited in Field, "The 'Andover Theory,' " pp. 469-72.

[10]Now Catholics and Lutherans are talking together about this. Indeed, they produced a joint statement saying there is more agreement on this point than the angry exchanges of the sixteenth century allowed for. See T. Austin Murphy and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Justification by Faith,* Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 7 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

[11]For example, the works of Ladislaus Boros, especially his *The Mystery of Death,*

trans. Gregory Bainbridge (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965). See also Edmund Fortman's discussion of this in *Everlasting Life After Death* (New York: Alba House, 1976), pp. 78-82, 154-55. See also Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* trans. Charles H. Henkey (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), 36-39.

[12]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 4/3, pt. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), pp. 477-78.

[13]Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1872), 1:26-27.

[14]Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 2:226-28, and Donald Bloesch, "Descent into Hell," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 313-14.

[15]John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), pp. 121-4, 213-220.

[16]Among the ecumenicals: Carl Braaten, *The Flaming Center: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 117; Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Christian Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 213-20; Russell F. Aldwinckle, *Jesus—a Savior or the Savior? Religious Pluralism in Christian Perspective* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982), pp. 179-215. Among the evangelicals: Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant," *Modern Theology* 6 (January 1990): 173-86. For an in-depth exegesis of the 1 Peter 3:19-20 and 4:6 passages that supports in a "kerygmatic" way the belief in divine perseverence see Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter,* ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. and aug. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 288-91, 255-63. Evangelical Clark Pinnock combines themes from eschatological evangelism and "inclusivism" in a unique way, as in his book *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992); see especially pp. 168-80.

[17]See Eugene Borowitz, "A Jewish Response: The Lure and Limits of Universalizing Our Faith," in *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World,* ed. Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), pp. 59-60.

[18]Mt 8:10-13; 9:1-8, 19-38; 10:32-33, 37-40; 11:27-30; 12:36-37; 17:19-20; Mk 2:5-12; 8:34-38; 9:23-25; 10:52; 11:22-26; Lk 5:20-25; 7:9-10; 8:48-50; 10:25-28; 15:7; Jn 1:12-13, 16-18; 3:3-8, 16-18, 28, 36; 4:10-14, 22, 42; 5:24; 6:29, 33-40, 47-51, 53-58, 68-69; 10:10; 11:25-26; 12:25-26, 50; 14:1-7, 23-24; 15:1-11; 17:1-5, 25-26; 20:30-31; Acts 2:36-39, 47; 3:17-19; 4:11-12; 8:21-22; 10:43; 11:13-18; 13:38-39, 48; 15:6-11; 16:30-34; 20:21, 32; 26:16-18; Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-22, 25-31; 4:3-17; 5:1-2, 8-11; 6:23; 8:28-30; 10:9-13; 11:1-6, 11, 13-14, 21-22; 1 Cor 1:9, 18-19, 21-24; 3:15; 5:5; 6:9-11; 15:1; 2 Cor 2:14-16; 4:4, 14; 5:18-21; 6:2; 7:9-10; 8:7-9; 10:7; 13:4-5; Gal 1:4; 2:15-16, 19-21; 3:6-14, 22-29; 4:4-7; 5:4-6; 6:8-9, 15; Eph 1:4-7; 2:3-5, 8-9, 13, 16, 18-19; 3:10-12, 17-19; 4:30-32; 5:8; Phil 2:12-13, 15-16; 3:8-11; Col 1:12-14, 20-23, 26-28; 2:2, 6, 12-13; 3:1-4, 12-13;

1 Thess 1:9-10; 4:14, 16; 5:5, 23-24; 2 Thess 1:3-10; 2:10, 12; 3:1-2; 1 Tim 1:16, 19; 2:3-6; 4:1, 16; 5:8; 6:12; 2 Tim 1:5-10; 2:11-13, 15; Tit 1:1-3; 3:5-8; Heb 4:2-3; 5:9-10, 12; 6:5-6; 7:24-25; 9:14-16; 10:32-36, 39; 13:20-21; Jas 1:17-18, 21; 2:5, 20-26; 5:20; 1 Pet 1:5-9, 19-23; 2:24; 4:17-19; 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3-4, 10-11; 1 Jn 1:1-7; 2:1-3; 3:1-4, 23-24; 4:9-10, 13-15; 5:4-5, 11-33; 2 Jn 1:9; Jude 20-23; Rev 14:12.

[19]See D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (New York: Scribner's, 1948), pp. 106-32.

Response to Fackre/Nash

[1]Ephesians 4:8-9 and the other passages Fackre mentions in passing are simply irrelevant.

Response to Fackre/Sanders

[1]See, for instance, Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

[2]For more discussion of this point see John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 227-28.

Restrictivism/Nash

[1]Much of the material in this chapter is adapted from Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994). It appears here with the permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

[2]I provide examples of several such beliefs in my book *Great Divides* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1993).

[3]Modalism is the mistaken belief that the three persons of the Trinity are not distinct centers of consciousness but only different ways in which the one God manifests himself.

[4]Some readers may wonder why my treatment of inclusivism includes so many references to the views of theologian Clark Pinnock when this book's chapter on that position is authored by John Sanders. It is important to understand the important sense in which Pinnock and Sanders both function as indispensable sources of information about their movement. To discuss inclusivism without including the ideas of Pinnock would leave my presentation seriously wanting in several respects.

[5]Christiáns distinguish between special and general revelation. Special revelation is illustrated by the unique disclosures God made to such people as Abraham, Moses and Paul. This kind of revelation is "special" because God gave it to particular people at particular times and places. This revelation also has a special function: to bring human beings to a saving relationship with the triune God. The special revelation that is still accessible to us has been preserved, recorded and inscripturated in the Bible, which evangelicals regard as the Word of God.

General revelation, as its name implies, is revelation that God makes available to all human beings. Psalm 19 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. The last half of Romans 1 reports that humans can come to know certain things about the Creator God through his creation. General revelation also gives humans general moral understanding so that certain kinds of conduct are known to be wrong.

[6]Clark H. Pinnock, "The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions," in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World,* ed. Mark A. Noll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 159.

[7]John Sanders, *No Other Name* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 215.

[8]Ibid., p. 255.

[9]As we will see, even this statement may turn out to be too generous, since some inclusivists like Pinnock seem to question whether saving faith requires any cognitive content at all.

[10]Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982), p. 248.

[11]For a discussion of a response by Sanders to this point, see Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* chap. 8.

[12]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 209.

[13]This question assumes the much more complete analysis of the other supposed proof-texts for the inclusivist position that can be found in *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*

[14]Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 224-25.

[15]Ibid., p. 225.

[16]See Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 255, 265, and also John E. Sanders, "Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988): 252-53.

[17]Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), p. 157.

[18]This is discussed at greater length in Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*

[19]Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy,* p. 161.

[20]Ibid., p. 94.

[21]Sanders, *No Other Name,* p. 220.

[22]Ibid., pp. 231-32.

[23]Nicole's comments have not been previously published. They are used here with his permission.

[24]See Sanders, *No Other Name,* p. 254.

[25]See F. F. Bruce's helpful analysis of the entire chapter in his commentary *The Book of Acts,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 201-18.

[26]Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy,* p. 165.

[27]Ibid., p. 96.

[28]Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,

1982), p. 39. It will not do to counter that Race may not be an inclusivist. His reading of Acts 17 is indistinguishable from that of Pinnock and other inclusivists.

[29]For more on this, see Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Dallas: Probe Books, 1992).

[30]Bruce, *Book of Acts,* p. 340.

[31]Acts 14:16-17 and Acts 15 are treated in Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* chap. 9.

[32]I recognize that this last claim only scratches the surface of this subject, but it is impractical to pursue the matter further in this book. I recommend a classic work on the topic: John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959). Owen, a Puritan scholar, provides a detailed analysis of "every" universalist text.

[33]Sanders, *No Other Name,* p. 67.

[34]Sanders, "Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988): 246-47.

[35]Ibid., p. 248.

[36]Clark Pinnock, "Acts 4:12—No Other Name Under Heaven," in *Through No Fault of Their Own?* ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 110.

[37]Ibid., p. 112.

[38]Sanders, *No Other Name,* p. 64.

[39]In other words, Sanders suggests, if Peter's readers really came to believe that their ungodly tormentors would be saved after death, this would incline believers to worldliness. See Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 207-8. Since Sanders distances himself from the doctrine of PME, it is hard to know whether he is expressing his own understanding of the text or simply describing what an advocate of PME might say.

[40]Sanders, "Is Belief in Christ Necessary?" p. 248.

[41]Once again, I acknowledge my appreciation to Zondervan Publishing House for its permission to use material from my book Is Jesus the Only Savior? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994). I also appreciate the helpful comments my work received from a number of people, including Doug Geivett of Talbot Theological Seminary, R. C. Sproul, Mike Glodo and Roger Nicole of Reformed Theological Seminary-Orlando and Ken Gentry Jr. of Christ College in Greenville, South Carolina. Ron Taber provided invaluable assistance in the technical aspects of manuscript preparation.

Responsé to Nash/Sanders

[1]For surveys and a bibliography on those who affirm inclusivism see John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Inquiry into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 20-25, 267-80.

[2]See Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead?" *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (January 1994): 3-17.

[3]See also Sanders, *No Other Name,* pp. 244-46.

Response to Nash/Fackre

[1]Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 25.

[2]Ibid., p. 135.

[3]Ibid., p. 164.

[4]Leonhard Goppelt's detailed and penetrating exegesis of the 1 Peter passages interrelates them and holds them to be a "kerygmatic" declaration of "a ministry of the dead and resurrected Christ among the dead." See Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. and aug. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 263 and passim.

[5]For an extended exegesis of John 14:6 see Gabriel Fackre, *Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World,* vol. 2 of *The Christian Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 254-340.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Surveys of the Topic

Sanders, John. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992.

Sullivan, Francis. *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response.* New York: Paulist, 1992.

Restrictivism

Borland, James. "A Theologian Looks at the Gospel and World Religions." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 3-11.

Nash, Ronald. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.

Inclusivism

Anderson, J. N. D. *Christianity and World Religions,* chap. 5. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Kreeft, Peter. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven,* chap. 10. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982.

Pinnock, Clark. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992.

Divine Perseverance

Davis, Stephen. "Universalism, Hell and the Fate of the Ignorant." *Modern Theology* 6 (January 1990): 173-86.

Fackre, Gabriel. *The Christian Story,* 1:219-41, 2:254-340. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984-1987.

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Walls, Jerry. *Hell: The Logic of Damnation.* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

Miscellaneous

Clarke, Andrew, and Bruce Winter, eds. *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992.

Crockett, William, and James Sigountos, eds. *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991.

Richard, Ramesh. *The Population of Heaven: A Biblical Response to the Inclusivist Position on Who Will Be Saved.* Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

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John Sanders is instructor in theology and philosophy at Oak Hills Bible College, Bemidji, Minnesota, and the author of *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized.* **Gabriel Fackre** is professor of theology at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre Massachusetts, and the author of *The Christian Story.* **Ronald H. Nash** is professor of theology and philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida, and the author of *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*

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